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**TRINITARIANS AND CALVINISTS,**

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**DR. WOODS' LETTERS**

**TO UNITARIANS.**

—  
**BY HENRY WARE, D. D.**

Hollis Professor of Divinity in the University at Cambridge.

—  
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# LETTERS

ADDRESSED

TO TRINITARIANS AND CALVINISTS.

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## LETTER I.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

**T**HE Letters of the Rev. Dr. Woods to Unitarians, which have now been for some time before the public, suggest to me the propriety of addressing the few following pages on the same subjects, to Trinitarians and Calvinists. I feel the greater readiness to do it, and enter upon the task the more cheerfully, as the discussion of the interesting subjects, about which they are concerned, seems to be taking a character of moderation, temperance, and urbanity, which promises a favourable result. It assures us, that the great end, which, on each side, we propose to ourselves, will not be lost sight of in the ardour of debate, and the desire to maintain subordinate opinions, in which we differ from each other; and that we are not going to sacrifice the spirit of religion to any of its forms, or its dogmas.

I am far from thinking religious controversy to be universally an evil. It becomes so, only when it is improperly conducted. It is bad, and produces bad effects, only when the discussion of interesting questions of faith or duty is carried on with an intemperate spirit, or with sophistry; and when the

disputants, ranged on each side, manifest more of a spirit of party, than of the love of truth. So far indeed is the public discussion of those questions, about which Christians hold different opinions, from being a thing, that should be discouraged as hurtful; that we ought rather to rejoice in it, as an evidence of a prevailing interest in the subject of religion in general, as a symptom of religious life in the community, and as a means of preserving that life, of awakening a deeper interest, of turning the public attention still more to the subject, and thus furnishing opportunities for impressing upon the minds of men a sense, which they might otherwise not have, of its high value and importance. These desirable effects it may produce in a considerable degree, however imperfectly and defectively the controversy may be conducted, and although great faults of manner, and even of temper, may mingle themselves in the debate. But if there be a reasonable degree of exemption from bad passions, party views, the arts of controversy, and offensive personality; the effect of bringing the subject into view, in the various lights in which it may be presented, can hardly fail to be highly favourable to the cause of Christian truth.

The book, which has given occasion to the present pamphlet, and upon which some remarks will be made in the course of the discussions which follow, is entitled to more than common attention on several accounts. The subjects of which it treats are in themselves highly important; and being those, about which the Christian community is at the pres-

ent time much divided, they have excited a peculiar interest of late by being brought more frequently than common before the public mind. It comes from a gentleman of acknowledged talents and learning, and of high standing among his brethren as a scholar and a theologian. It professes to speak with authority, as it speaks in the name of that part of the Christian community, for whom it claims the very honourable distinction of "the Orthodox of New England," and is designed to explain and defend the opinions, by which they are distinguished, for the purpose of guarding them against misapprehension, and in order to do away the effects of misrepresentation.

The writer of the following sheets hopes to perform the duty he has assigned himself, whatever may be its defects in other respects, in a spirit, which shall not be liable to exception. It is his design to make such remarks, as occur to him, on the opinions and reasonings of the pamphlet before him, and to give a free exposition of his own views upon the several subjects treated of by Dr. Woods, together with the reasoning, by which he has been led into those views. But he wishes it to be understood, that they are his own views only. He is not authorized, nor does he profess, to speak in the name of any party or body of Christians. How far his opinions on the subjects in controversy, and his manner of explaining and defending them, may agree with those of his friends, he knows not. He is willing to avail himself of this opportunity of appearing before the public on these subjects, believ-

ing that the cause of Christian truth cannot fail of being promoted by unreserved freedom in the discussion of controverted doctrines ; and by individuals communicating the result of their study and thought, without any reference to the opinions of the party or sect, to which they may be considered in general as belonging.

With respect to the points at issue between those, who are called Unitarians on the one hand, and Trinitarians and Calvinists on the other, it is of some importance that you should know in what light they are viewed, and what degree of importance is attached to them by Unitarians. Upon this subject, there is probably with us, as with you, some diversity of opinion ; though I am persuaded that no intelligent Unitarian can think them unimportant, and practically a matter of indifference. It cannot be imagined, that the constitution of things is such, as to render truth and error on any subject perfectly indifferent, and equally salutary. And it is believed, as I shall have occasion to show in the sequel, that the doctrines for which we contend, and which are the subject of controversy between us, are calculated, as far as their effects are not prevented, nor counteracted by other causes, to have a better moral influence in forming the character, than the opposite doctrines ; and that their reception and prevalence cannot fail to have great influence on the reception and spread of christianity in the world. At the same time, it is not maintained, that any one of the doctrines, about which we differ, is fundamental in such a sense,

that the opposite is incompatible with the Christian character, and forfeits the Christian name for him who maintains it. It is not doubted, that all the best influences of Christian faith may be felt, and the Christian life acted out, and the consolations and hopes of the Gospel enjoyed by those, whose speculative opinions, upon each of the several points of controversy, which lie between us, are in opposition to each other.

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## LETTER II.

I SHALL confine myself to a few passing remarks on what is contained in some of the first letters of Dr. Woods, wishing to draw your attention chiefly to the important articles of doctrine, which are discussed in the remaining ones; since, with the exception of the doctrine of the divine Unity, they involve the most interesting questions, that lie between us and you.

With respect to what is implied in no equivocal manner in the beginning of the second letter, I would only observe, that as to the propriety of *having* a creed, no doubt, I believe, has ever been entertained. Unitarians have always claimed the right of every individual to have his own particular creed. What they have sometimes had occasion to object to is, not that each of the several sects and denominations of Christians should have its own creed, nor, that any individual should have one; but that

any, whether an individual or a body of Christians, should insist upon their creed being the creed of others; either as a title to the Christian name, or as a condition of their being admitted to the participation of any Christian privileges.

In the concluding part of the same letter, and in the two following, Dr. Woods proceeds to charge Mr. Channing with a gross misrepresentation of the opinions of the Orthodox upon two points, the Unity of God, and his moral perfection; and of injustice in claiming these as distinguishing articles of the Unitarian Faith. Now, in respect to the first of these, the Unity of God, it is to be recollected, that the question is not, whether the Unity of God be *asserted* by Trinitarians. This is not denied them; but the true question is, whether opinions are or are not held by them in relation to this subject, which cannot be reconciled with the divine Unity. It is with this, and not with the other, that they are charged by Unitarians. Full credit is given to their word, when they declare their belief in the Unity of God, and when they tell us "it is asserted in all their systems of Divinity, and all their Confessions of Faith." Nor is there any thing that I can perceive in Mr. Channing's Sermon, that contradicts this. But until more than this is done, and until something more satisfactory, than has yet been said, can be alleged by them to show, that the commonly received doctrine of the Trinity is reconcileable with the proper Unity of God, we must be allowed to consider the charge as still lying in its full force. Of this the most



respectable Trinitarian writers seem not to be insensible. How much they are pressed with this difficulty, and how impossible they find it to extricate themselves from it, appears in the variety of explanations which have been successively resorted to, and the dissatisfaction expressed with every attempt that has been made for the purpose. The last expedient, indeed, that of rejecting the use of the phrase "three persons," as applied to the Deity, and substituting for it that of "three distinctions," if by distinctions be meant any thing short of separate persons or agents, may be considered as restoring the divine Unity. But it reduces the Trinity to a mere unmeaning name, and were it not an abuse of language of mischievous tendency, would leave nothing on the subject, that need be thought worth contending about.

Professor Stuart (p. 23) expresses regret that the term *person* had ever come into the symbols of the churches, sensible, as it appears, that it cannot be used in any intelligible meaning, without infringing on the Unity, and running into palpable Tritheism; and the late President Dwight, though he contends for the propriety of the term, (vol. ii. p. 137,) as a *convenient* one for expressing the things intended by the doctrine, yet confesses, that if he is asked *what* it means, he must answer, I know not. But what is the particular convenience of the use of a term, which expresses no meaning, not even in the mind of him that uses it, we are left to conjecture.

Upon the other charge, which relates to the moral perfections of God, the course which Dr. Woods has pursued seems to me liable to objection. In his fourth Letter, in stating what was necessary on his part, and the mode of reasoning proper to be pursued, in order to relieve the system he has undertaken to defend, from the charge of inconsistency with the moral perfections of God, he says, "we have nothing to do with the inquiry, whether the common doctrine of depravity can consist with the moral perfection of God, nor with any difficulty whatever in the attempt to reconcile them." This is certainly a very extraordinary thought, that in defending his system against an objection to which it is thought liable, he should have nothing to do with the very objection itself, nor with the difficulty it involves. Did the question relate to the simple fact, whether the doctrine of depravity, as maintained by the Orthodox, were a doctrine of scripture or not, its consistency or inconsistency with the moral perfections of God would indeed make no part of the ground, on which the argument should proceed. But the question he had to consider was a different one from this. The doctrine of depravity, together with the associated doctrines, has a place in the system of Orthodox faith. It is upon the ground of these doctrines, as Dr. Woods expressly admits, (p. 25,) that Mr. Channing has used the language, which he understands as implying the charge under consideration, viz. "that the Orthodox deny the moral perfection of God." Now it certainly does belong to him, who would relieve

the system from that imputation, to show, not only that the doctrine of depravity, but that all the other doctrines connected with it in the Calvinistic system, are consistent with the moral perfection of God. This is the very point at issue, and the only point, so far as relates to this charge, with which he had any concern; and all that he has said to show, that he maintains many views respecting the divine government and purposes in common with Unitarians, and which are consistent with the moral perfections of God, will do nothing toward proving that he does not maintain other opinions, which are not reconcileable with it. He was required, therefore, in undertaking to repel this charge, not only to prove, which I shall afterward show he has not done, that the scheme of doctrine, which he defends, is taught in the scriptures, but also to prove that it is in itself consistent with the moral perfection of God. But this he has not attempted to do. He has, on the contrary, said that, which implies, that whatever the fact may be, the consistency demanded cannot be seen to exist. Now if he, who believes the doctrines in question to be taught in the scriptures, is yet unable to perceive *how* they are reconcileable with the moral perfection of God; ought he to be greatly surprised, or much disturbed, that another, who cannot find them taught in the bible, and who sees them therefore only as human opinions, without authority, should represent them as irreconcilable with that moral perfection, which he does find there clearly and constantly taught?

There is another consideration also, not to be overlooked, to show that he had something to do with this inquiry. If the doctrine of depravity, as it is maintained by the Orthodox, cannot be perceived by us to be consistent with the moral perfection of God, the presumption is very strong, that it is not true; since, if it actually be inconsistent, it certainly cannot be true. In proportion then to the difficulty of reconciling it, the proof of it from scripture and our experience ought to be clear, and not liable to objection. The neglect, therefore, to remove this fundamental objection to the whole system, you perceive, must have its influence upon all the reasoning employed in the direct proof of its several parts. Nothing but the most clear and satisfactory proof will be sufficient for the support of a doctrine, which labours under the weight of so much intrinsic incredibility, confessedly incapable of being removed.

I have one other remark to make in this place. Dr. Woods has stated correctly, (p. 26) "That independently of revelation, and well known facts, we are incapable of judging, what the goodness of God will require, as to the condition of man; or what man's character and state must be under the government of a being infinitely wise and benevolent." But the inference he would draw from this, I think you will perceive, is not warranted by the premises. For although it be conceded, that from the limitation of our faculties, we are incapable of saying what the goodness or justice of God would require: we *have* faculties capable of deciding with

certainty, what they will *not admit*. We can pronounce without hesitation with respect to some things, that they are absolutely irreconcilable with those attributes. To say that we have not faculties for this, is to say, not that our knowledge is limited and imperfect, but that it is actually nothing. There may be a thousand cases, like those stated by Dr. Woods, which, previous to experience, we could not have foreseen, nor should have expected, which when first proposed present difficulties, but which are yet capable of being accounted for in a satisfactory manner, and reconciled with that justice and goodness, with which they seem at first to be at variance. But other cases, it is evident, may be supposed, which would admit of no such explanation. And what I contend is, that the orthodox doctrine, as to the natural "character of man, and the manner in which God designates the heirs of salvation," (p. 25) is of this kind; and that Dr. Woods' assertion, (p. 27) "that the facts he has there stated, and which are known to all, are as far from being agreeable to what we should naturally imagine the infinite goodness of God would dictate, as the fact that men are subjects of moral depravity," cannot be supported. There is no such analogy between the cases, as to warrant the conclusion. For we can see, with respect to the former, how they *may* be consistent with the moral perfections of God; but we can make no supposition, upon which we shall be able to perceive, that the latter *can* be so. The reason is, that, with respect to all the former cases, such as the promis-

cuous suffering and ruin brought upon men by plagues, hurricanes, and earthquakes,—the cruelties and horrors of the slave-trade,—and the darkness and ignorance to which so large a portion of the human race are by the inevitable circumstances of their condition subjected,—the evil is not final and remediless, but is partial or temporary, and may be considered as inflicted for the purpose of discipline; and the single consideration, that it makes a part of human probation, and that the subject of it may yet, by the manner in which he conducts under it, be an infinite gainer in the whole of his existence, relieves it from all objection arising from any supposed inconsistency with the justice or goodness of God. But the doctrine of the native depravity of man, taken in its connexion with the whole scheme of which it is a part; personal unconditional election, a complete atonement made for those, who are thus ordained to eternal life, and their regeneration by a special irresistible influence of the spirit of God; and what is the necessary and infallible consequence of all this, the equal unconditional reprobation and final and everlasting ruin of all the rest of the human race, certainly admits of no such reconciliation with any notion we can have of the moral perfection of the Author of our being.

As Dr. Woods, however, makes no attempt to show how they are capable of being reconciled; as he has virtually admitted that they are incapable of being perceived by us to be consistent with each other; and has contented himself with endeavouring to prove the several doctrines as matters of fact,

upon the principle, that if he can clearly prove them to be doctrines of scripture, he is not bound to show how they can be consistent with the divine perfections, it is unnecessary to say any thing more to show, that the imputation of which he complains is not removed. I shall therefore proceed directly to the consideration of the evidence upon which the several doctrines in question rest as matters of fact.

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### LETTER III.

THE discussion introduced by Dr. Woods in his fourth Letter, and pursued through the fifth and sixth, relates to "the natural character of man." As the question, "what is the natural character of man," lies at the very foundation of the controversy between Unitarians on the one hand, and Trinitarians and Calvinists on the other, it will prepare us for a fair discussion of it, to examine in the first place what is the precise difference of opinion between them on the subject.

Heretofore, those who claimed the title of Orthodox, and professed to follow the doctrine of Calvin, were satisfied with the language used by the Westminster Divines in the Catechism and Confession of Faith, in which the doctrines of that reformer are expressed with remarkable precision and distinctness. In them the doctrine, which respects

the natural state of man since the fall, and in consequence of that event, has two parts. They represent the first sin of our first parent, as *imputed* to all his posterity, who are said *to have sinned in him, and to have fallen with him*; and they teach the entire corruption of man's nature, *that he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil,—under the displeasure and curse of God, and liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come.*

It seems that the first part of this account, though it was formerly reckoned one of the principal tests of Orthodoxy, more zealously maintained than any other, is now given up. It is wholly omitted in the Creed adopted by the Theological Institution in Andover. It is expressly given up by Dr. Woods. “The Orthodox in New England at the *present day,*” he tells us, p. 44, “are not chargeable with the erroneous opinions held by their predecessors. The imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, in any sense, which those words naturally and properly convey, is a doctrine which we do not believe.” This change in the opinions of the Orthodox, and advance toward what we believe to be right views, we are glad to witness; and have no doubt that the same correct mode of thinking and reasoning, which has led to it, will lead also to the rejection of the other part of the doctrine, which has heretofore been considered as inseparably connected with it. We think that further reflection will convince them, that they *are*



inseparably connected—that if the imputation of Adam’s guilt is a solecism, and inconsistent with the moral character of God, it is equally so, that, in consequence of it, all his posterity should come into being with a nature so totally corrupt and inclined to sin, as to be incapable of any good.

I could have wished that Dr. Woods had given a more distinct and compact definition of the doctrine he meant to defend on this point, that there might be no mistake of the question between us. From scattered expressions, however, and from his having made no exception with respect to this part of the doctrine, I think we are to conclude, though he chooses to express it in somewhat softened and qualified language, that he holds it in its full extent. By such expressions as the following, (p. 31) “by nature men are subjects of an innate moral depravity;”.....“while unrenewed, their moral affections and actions are wholly wrong.” (p. 43) “All, without exception by nature, or in consequence of their natural birth, are in such a state of moral impurity, as disqualifies them for the enjoyments of heaven, unless they are renewed by the Holy Spirit.” And (p. 46) “Adam’s transgression had such a relation to his posterity, that in consequence of it, they were constituted sinners, and subjected to death, and all other sufferings, as *penal evils* ;” he means all that is meant by the following expressions in the Assembly’s Catechism and Confession of Faith. “The corruption of his nature, by which he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all

evil, and that continually—and that men are thus by nature, as they are born, under the displeasure and curse of God; justly liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come.”

I am fortified in this by recurring to the Creed of the Institution with which he is connected, in which I find the following passage. “That in consequence of his [Adam’s] disobedience, all his descendants were constituted sinners: that by nature every man is personally depraved, destitute of holiness, unlike and opposed to God, and that previously to the renewing agency of the Divine Spirit, all his moral actions are adverse to the character and glory of God; that being morally incapable of recovering the image of his Creator, which was lost in Adam, every man is justly exposed to eternal damnation.”

The doctrine respecting the natural condition of man, which I shall now state, and endeavour to maintain in opposition to this, may be expressed in the following manner.

Man is by nature, by which is to be understood, as he is born into the world, as he comes from the hands of the Creator, innocent and pure; free from all moral corruption, as well as destitute of all positive holiness; and, until he has, by the exercise of his faculties, actually formed a character either good or bad, an object of the divine complacency and favour. The complacency and favour of the Creator are expressed in all the kind provisions that are made by the constitution of things for his improvement and happiness. He is by nature no more inclined or disposed to vice than to virtue, and is

equally capable, in the ordinary use of his faculties, and with the common assistance afforded him, of either. He derives from his ancestors a frail and mortal nature; is made with appetites, which fit him for the condition of being in which God has placed him; but in order for them to answer all the purposes intended, they are so strong, as to be very liable to abuse by excess. He has passions implanted in him, which are of great importance in the conduct of life, but which are equally capable of impelling him into a wrong or a right course. He has natural affections, all of them originally good, but liable by a wrong direction to be the occasion of error and sin. He has reason and conscience to direct the conduct of life, and enable him to choose aright; which reason may yet be neglected, or perverted, and conscience misguided. The whole of these together make up what constitutes his trial and probation. They make him an accountable being, a proper subject to be treated according as he shall make a right or wrong choice, being equally capable of either, and as free to the one as to the other.

That this, and not the scheme of innate moral depravity, is the truth, I shall endeavour now to show by arguments drawn

1. From observation and experience, and
2. From the Scriptures.

It is to my purpose, previous to entering on this discussion, to observe, what the Orthodox will not hesitate to admit, that judging beforehand, the scheme of total moral depravity, or of any original

bias to evil rather than good, is something different from what we should expect, and involves great difficulty in reconciling it with the moral perfections of God. This, as I have before observed, is implied (p. 29) by Dr. Woods himself. I admit, with him, that this is not a sufficient reason for rejecting it in opposition to the evidence of fact, and of scripture, and for the reason which he gives, viz. that we are finite, and cannot so comprehend the purposes and conduct of an infinite being, as to be certain, that what *seems* to us inconsistent with his moral character, is so in reality. But *it is* a good reason for yielding our assent with caution, not till we have examined with care, and not without very satisfactory evidence. It is a reason for suspending our assent, and reexamining, so as to be entirely satisfied as to the fact. I have another remark also to make. The doctrine, it is confessed, is repulsive. The mind naturally revolts at it. It *seems* at first, to all men, universally, to be inconsistent with the divine perfection. But the first impression is made upon us by the nature which God has given us; and I think we should be slow to believe that a nature, thus given to all, is intended to mislead and actually does mislead all, on so important a question. It is certainly an extraordinary fact, if a fact it is, that God should first give to man a corrupt nature, wholly averse to good and inclined to evil, and at the same time endow him with a moral discernment and feelings, which lead him instinctively to deny that God can so have made him, because inconsistent with justice and goodness; that is, that he has given him

a natural sense of right and wrong, which leads him to arraign the conduct of the Being who made him.

I proceed now to the inquiry, what observation and experience teach us, as to the fact of human depravity. And here we must not forget, that the question is, not whether there is a great deal of wickedness in the world, but what is the source of that wickedness ; not whether mankind are very corrupt, but how they became so ; whether it is a character born with them, or acquired ; whether it is what God made them, or what they have made themselves. All that is said of the prevalence of wickedness in the world may be true, and yet none of it the effect of an original taint, which men brought into the world with them ; none of it making a part of their original nature. I may acquiesce in the mournful and humbling representations given of the violence of human passions, the brutal excesses that follow the unrestrained indulgence of the appetites ; the intemperance and self-indulgence of individuals ; the wrongs, violation of the rights, and neglect of the duties of domestic life ; the injustice, and fraud, and violence, prevalent in every form in all the transactions of social life ; the pride, and selfishness, and regardlessness of the rights and feelings of others, appearing in a thousand forms ; the wars which desolate the earth, the abuses of government, and the oppression and tyranny, that are exercised by some over the rest of their fellow-beings. All these representations may be true, and no more than a just account of what actually takes place, and yet the whole be fairly accounted for,

without any original and natural bias to sin. All may be but the effect of neglect to restrain appetites, in themselves useful and good, to control and give a proper direction to passions designed to be useful and capable of the very best effects, and in general a failure to exercise properly, in temptations and trials, the powers of direction and resistance, which were in themselves sufficient.

But, although this reply may be made, were the representation usually given of the human character, and of the prevalence of wickedness, correct in its fullest extent; I am satisfied that I am not called upon by truth to make that concession. I insist, that the account usually given of human wickedness is exaggerated. It is a partial account, and such as gives a very wrong impression. Men are not the mere brutes and fiends, which it would make them. There is much of good as well as of evil in the human character, and in the conduct of man. Indeed, I hesitate not to say, that as much as there is of wickedness and vice, there is far more of virtue and goodness; as much as there is of ill-will, unkindness, injustice, and inhumanity, there is incomparable more of kindness, good disposition, pity, and charity. I insist, that if we take a fair and full view, we shall find that wickedness, far from being the prevailing part of the human character, makes but an inconsiderable part of it. That in by far the largest part of human beings, the just, and kind, and benevolent dispositions prevail beyond measure over the opposite; and that even in the worst men, good feelings and principles are predom-

inant, and they probably perform in the course of their lives many more good than bad actions; as the greatest liar does, by the constitution of his nature, doubtless speak many truths to every lie he utters. One great source of misapprehension is, that virtues and good qualities are silent, secret, noiseless; vices are bold, public, noisy, seen by all, felt by all, noted by all.

But whether this be so or not, the ground for rejecting the doctrine of innate original moral depravity will not be materially affected. It is not supported by observation and experience, as we have a right to demand of a doctrine so apparently inconsistent with the moral attributes of the Deity.

What I assert upon this point, and think to be very obvious and capable of being made out to entire satisfaction, is, that observation and experience are altogether favourable to the view I have stated of the human character and condition, and that without revelation there is nothing that would lead a reflecting man to the thought of an innate moral depravity.

It is easy to bring together into one picture, and place in a strong light, with exaggerated features, all the bad passions in their uncontrolled and unqualified state, all the atrocious crimes that have been committed, all the bad dispositions that have been indulged; but the picture, though it contain nothing, but what is found in men, will be far, very far, from being a just picture of human nature. Let all that is virtuous, and kind, and amiable, and good, be brought into the picture, and presented in

their full proportions, and the former will be found to constitute a far less part of it, than we were ready to imagine.

Our most correct ideas of human nature will be drawn from the characteristics of infancy, and the earliest indications of disposition, tendency, and character in the infant mind ; and if the nature of man be corrupt, inclined to evil, and evil only, it will appear there with its unequivocal marks. But do we find it there, and is it the common, untaught sentiment of mankind, that it exists there ? Far from it. Innocence, and simplicity, and purity are the characteristics of early life. Truth is natural ; falsehood is artificial. Veracity, kindness, goodwill flow from the natural feelings. Duplicity, and all the cold, and selfish, and calculating manners of society are the fruit of education, and intercourse with the world. We have marks enough of a feeble, helpless nature, calling for sympathy, assistance, support, kindness ; but we see no proofs of depravity, of malignity, of inclination to evil in preference to good. How early does the infant discover affection, attachment, gratitude to those from whom it receives kindness ! How universally is it an object of interest to those about it ! Would it be so, if it manifested such tokens, as the orthodox doctrine of depravity supposes, of an inclination, disposition, and tendency, wholly directed to evil, and if it appeared to possess nothing good, and no tendency to good ? Instead of this, must it not naturally be the object of aversion and disgust, and especially so to pious and virtuous persons, who can only love and



approve those, whom God loves and approves ; and who therefore can see in little children, only objects of the divine displeasure and wrath, beings wholly averse to God and all that is good, and who deserve, not sympathy and affection, but all punishments of this world and the world to come ?

It is often said, that children are naturally inclined to falsehood and deception, and that they early lie and deceive, rather than speak the truth. But this charge needs proof ; and I apprehend it will be found that evidence is abundantly against it, and in favour of the natural veracity of children. It will rarely be found, that children disregard the truth, till by example, or bad education, or peculiar circumstances of temptation, they have learned to overcome and counteract the tendency of nature. That they are so proverbially simple, unsuspecting, and easily imposed upon, arises from their judging others by themselves. It is because they themselves are conscious of no thought of deceiving, that they never suspect others. Great differences of character in this, as in other respects, appear at an early age ; but what I have stated, I am persuaded is the general character, until the disposition and tendency of nature has been changed by education, example, and circumstances.

It is alleged, also, that children are naturally cruel ; and in proof of it, the pleasure they seem to take in torturing insects and small animals is sometimes mentioned. But the pleasure, which the convulsions and throes of a tortured insect or animal give to a child, arises from another source than

cruelty, or the desire of giving pain. It is wholly to be attributed to the love of excitement, and the pleasure it takes in rapid and violent motion ; and is wholly unconnected with the idea of suffering in the creature, with whose convulsions it is delighted. The same pleasure would be derived from the power of producing the same convulsive motions, and the same appearance in any inanimate substance. In proof of this, let a clear idea of the suffering of the insect be communicated to the child, and it will no longer take pleasure in its convulsions. A sentiment of compassion will be raised. It will be as eager to rescue it from its suffering, as before it was to inflict that suffering. This I am persuaded will usually, if not always, be the case. But if it were from native cruelty, the *love* of inflicting pain, or from any depravity of nature ; instead of ceasing from it the moment it was made acquainted with the suffering of the animal, that knowledge would be a new motive to proceed ; as it would give it the satisfaction of knowing, that its malignant purpose was effected, its cruel design accomplished. The same account is to be given of what is often called a mischievous disposition in children. It is not the love of mischief, but an exuberant love of activity. The mischief or inconvenience which they occasion to others is no part of the motive, but simply the love of action and strong excitement ; and it may be accompanied with the kindest feelings, the most sincere desire of giving pleasure to others, and as sincere an unwillingness to give pain or to cause uneasiness or displeasure.

Indeed I know not a single mark of early depravity, common to children in general, which may not, as these are, be fairly traced to causes, which imply no degree of depravity, and no fault of character, or of disposition. Individuals there may be, who give very early tokens of great perversity of mind, and corruption of heart. But these are exceptions from the general character of human nature, and, as such, have no place in the present argument; and if they had any, would be decisive, not in favour of the orthodox doctrine, but against it; as the *exception*, in its nature, proves the *opposite rule*. If great depravity is the exception, exemption from depravity must be the rule.

No man, I am persuaded, was ever led by personal observation and experience to the thought of an original depravity of human nature, according to which, by the bias of nature, all, without exception, who come into the world, are from their birth inclined wholly to evil, and averse to good.

And as little, I am persuaded, would any one be led to such an opinion by the general current of scripture. I am led to think so by a general view of the commands, precepts, exhortations, promises, and threatenings of religion, and by the whole history of the divine dispensations to men; and also by attending to a great number of particulars, each of which, separately, seems to me to imply, that mankind come into the world innocent and pure, the objects of the complacency of the Creator, and no more inclined, by the nature God has given them, to sin, than to virtue; no more disposed to hate and

disobey, than to love and obey their Maker. I shall instance only in one, but that alone, in my opinion, is decisive of the question. I refer to the manner in which little children are, on two occasions, spoken of by our Saviour, and on one by the Apostle Paul. (Matt. xix. 14) “Suffer little children to come unto me—for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” These appear to have been infants, or at least very small children, for he took them into his arms and blessed them. There is no intimation of any thing peculiar in them; no evidence that they were a few, selected from among many; nothing to suggest that they were different from other children; but rather, that they were like other children. There is not the slightest intimation that these particular children had become the subjects of any great moral change. But if they were depraved, destitute of holiness, averse from all good, inclined to all evil, enemies of God, subjects of his wrath, justly liable to all punishments, could our Saviour declare, respecting them, “of such is the kingdom of God?” And could he, on another occasion, say, (Matt. xviii. 3) “Unless ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God?” And again, (Mark x. 14. Luke xviii. 16) “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein?”

Could the Apostle Paul recommend to the Corinthians, (1 Cor. xiv. 20) “Be not children in understanding, but in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men;” that is, in understanding, in the power of distinguishing right and wrong, and

perceiving the truth, show yourselves to be men ; but in your dispositions, in your moral characters, manifest the gentleness, and mildness, and purity of children ? I know not how these passages are to be explained, so as to consist with the doctrine of innate depravity, rendering those who are the subjects of it enemies to God, &c. until renewed by the special influence of the spirit of God. I have never seen them satisfactorily explained upon that supposition, nor do I believe that they admit of such explanation. They most clearly imply, until turned from their obvious meaning, that young children are objects of the Saviour's complacency and affection ; that their innocency, gentleness, and good disposition are the proper objects of imitation ; that they are, what men are to become by conversion or regeneration.

But there are, as I have said, a few texts, from which the doctrine I am considering is inferred ; and these have been brought forward, and placed in all the strength of which they are capable, by those who believe and defend the doctrine, and particularly by the able advocate it has found in the author of the pamphlet before me.

It is not pretended, I believe, by any of the defenders of the native, hereditary depravity of the human race, that the doctrine is, any where in scripture, expressly asserted. It is not a matter of direct assertion, but of inference. It is considered as implied in several passages. Now I admit that a doctrine, no where expressly taught, may yet be so clearly and constantly implied, may so enter into the whole texture of the sacred writings, and appear

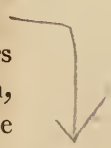
in every part, as to be as reasonable an object of our faith, as those doctrines, which are the most distinctly and formally enunciated. But examples of this kind are usually (I will not affirm always, but usually) such as are presented, not a few times only, and then in a doubtful form, but such as appear constantly, and enter as it were into the very substance of the whole. Such, for instance, is the being of God, no where asserted, but every where implied. Such is the moral freedom of man, upon which rests his accountability as a moral being; and such, in my apprehension, is the doctrine, that men become sinners, guilty before God, and objects of his displeasure only by their personal acts, and not by the nature with which they came into being.

The first text adduced, as implying innate total depravity, is Gen. vi. 5. A few remarks will show how little it is to the purpose, and how far from supporting what is made to rest upon it. For, in the first place, it relates not to mankind universally, but to the degenerate race of men of that age, so remarkably and universally corrupt, beyond all that had gone before, or have followed since, as to call for the most signal tokens of the vengeance of heaven. In the second place, were it said of all men in every age, instead of being confined, as it is, to the inhabitants of the earth at that particular time, it would still be nothing to the purpose, for which it is brought. There is no assertion of native derived depravity, none of a corrupt nature, no intimation of hereditary guilt, no reference to innate aversion to good and inclination to evil. It is the

mere assertion of a state of great corruption and wickedness, which no one denies ; and not only of external actions, such as “the world being full of violence,” but of purposes and dispositions of the heart, implying deep-rooted and radical wickedness, expressed by “the imaginations of the heart.” But this is all perfectly consistent with their coming into being, innocent and pure. It is not what they are by nature, but by habit ; not what they were as they came from the hands of the Creator, but what they have become in the use or rather abuse of his gifts, and of the condition in which he placed them.

It is said that the language here is universal, as also when it is used again in the viii. chapter ; and that its application to *man universally* in all ages and nations, is confirmed by the passages quoted by Paul, in the iii. chapter of Romans from Psalms xiv. liii. v. cxl. x. xxxvi. and Isaiah lix. where he describes Jews and Gentiles of that age, in passages borrowed from the Old Testament, and applies them as descriptive of the character of mankind without exception. But in each case the argument wholly fails of proving what it is brought to prove ; because it depends for its force on an interpretation of language, which cannot be adopted without leading to consequences, which the advocates of universal original depravity would be as slow to admit, as its opposers.

It goes on the supposition that the sacred writers used words, as no other writers ever did use them, with perfect philosophical exactness, instead of the popular sense ; and that their writings were to be



interpreted by rules, to which no other writings will bear to be subjected.

Universal expressions, like those in the texts in question, are so far from being always used in their strict literal sense, that they are *usually relative*, to be understood and interpreted in relation to the subject and occasion. Thus when it is said, (1 Tim. ii. 4) “God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth,” it relates to the question, whether any class or nation of men are excluded from the favour and good-will of God, and therefore ought to be excluded from a share in the benevolent regards and prayers of Christians; so that *all men* means, not every individual, but all ranks, descriptions, and conditions of men. In the unlimited sense of the words it is not true. It is not true that God wills every individual to come to the knowledge of truth, i. e. of the Gospel; for thousands are precluded from the possibility of it by the circumstances of their being. Nor is it true, that he wills all men to be finally saved; but only all of every rank, and every nation, who are penitent, obedient, and faithful. He wills none to be excluded from having the truth proposed, and salvation offered to them. And that *all*, who receive and obey it, shall actually obtain the salvation offered. So also (Tit. ii. 11) when it is said, “the grace of God bringing salvation hath appeared to *all men*,” the meaning cannot be, *every individual*, for it never has been published to *all* in that sense. But, as in the other case, to men of every nation, age, rank, condition, and in the



same sense in which Paul (Col. i. 23) spoke of the Gospel, as “preached to every creature under heaven.”

It is in a similar, popular, qualified sense, a sense never leading men into mistakes upon other subjects and common occasions, that Moses, speaking of the general wickedness and corruption of manners, which were the occasion of the flood, uses language, which in its strictly literal import might be understood to mean, that there was no virtue remaining on the earth; though he immediately tells us, that Noah was an exception to the prevailing wickedness, that “he found favour in the eyes of the Lord, (ch. vi. 8, 9) being a just man, perfect in his generations, and one who walked with God.”

The same remark occurs with equal force in respect to the passage so much relied on in the xiv. Psalm. Not only is there no intimation as to the origin and source of the evil, no intimation of an inbred, innate, hereditary depravity, but only of great and general corruption of manners; but, though a verbal universality is expressed, the very Psalm itself takes care to teach us with what qualifications it is to be understood. For while it asserts, in the strong language of emotion and eastern hyperbole, “that all were gone aside, all together become filthy, none that did good, *no, not one,*” the writer seems wholly unconscious of a design to have his language understood according to its literal import; for he immediately goes on with expressions absolutely incompatible with such a meaning. He goes on to speak of a “people of God, a generation

of the righteous, whose refuge was God." The same is the case with each of the other Psalms, quoted by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans.

But it is of little comparative importance, whether the authors of the Psalms, or the Apostle in quoting them, meant to be understood as expressing a general truth in popular language, or as expressing themselves with literal philosophical exactness. Understand them in the most unlimited, unqualified sense, of which their words are capable, they express only what no one will deny, that all men are sinners. The question will still be open, as before, how this universality of sin and great corruption of manners are to be accounted for. Whether, as the advocates of Orthodoxy contend, men come into the world with a corrupt nature, prone only to wickedness, and utterly incapable of any good thought or action, till renewed by an influence of the holy spirit, which they can do nothing to procure; or as Unitarians believe, this corrupt nature is not what they received from God, but what they have made for themselves. That they were not made sinners, but became so by yielding to temptations, which it was in their power to resist; by obeying the impulse of the passions, and the calls of appetite, in opposition to the direction of reason and the notices of conscience; by subjecting themselves to the dominion of the inferior part of their nature, instead of putting themselves under the guidance of their superior faculties.

Questions may be asked upon this statement, which cannot be answered, because we have not

faculties which enable us in any cases to trace things up to the first cause and spring of action. But no difficulty so great and insurmountable meets us, as, on the opposite theory, is the moral difficulty in which it involves the character of the Author of our being. When we have traced back the wickedness of men, as it actually exists, to the voluntary neglect, and perversion, and abuse of the nature God has given them, we can go no farther.

It is asserted, (pp. 38, 39) "that when we read in the Bible the highest descriptions of human wickedness in the old world, in Sodom, in Canaan, in Jerusalem; or of the wickedness of individuals, as Pharaoh, Saul, Jeroboam, and Judas; it is perfectly just and natural for us to reflect, *such is human nature, such is man*; and orthodox writers reason in an unexceptionable manner, when they undertake to show, what *human nature* is, from the description which is given of the wickedness of man in the Old Testament."

The writer, I think, must perceive that he has expressed himself rashly or carelessly, when he considers clearly the force and bearing of what he has said in the above paragraph. Are we to consider those places, which, singled out and distinguished from all others, are expressly declared to have been destroyed for their enormous and incorrigible wickedness, as fair representatives of the usual state and character of the human race? People, who were ordered to be wholly extirpated for the very purpose of stopping the contagion of their vices, preventing the spread of the infection, and

serving as a warning to other nations to prevent their becoming like them? Are Pharaoh, Jeroboam, and Judas, fair examples and representatives of human nature? Men, singled out in a history of two thousand years, as instances of uncommon wickedness, visited with as uncommon tokens of retributory justice? Let it be asked, why the cruelty and obstinacy of Pharaoh, rather than the humanity, and piety, and meekness of Moses; why the idolatry, and unprincipled ambition, and selfishness of Jeroboam, rather than the piety, tenderness of conscience, and public spirit of Josiah; why the single wretch, who was so base and sordid as to sell and betray his Master, rather than the eleven, who were true and faithful to him, should be selected as specimens of the race to which they belong, and the great community of which they make a part?

Would you select the period of seven years' famine, as an example of the usual fertility of Egypt? The desolating pestilence in the days of David, as a fair specimen of the salubrity of the climate of Israel? Would you go to a lazaret-house or hospital, rather than to the fields, the wharves, and the factories, to know what is the usual state of human health and activity? Is an idiot or a madman a just specimen of the human intellect? Or are we to find in our prisons, and at the gallows, in highwaymen, pirates, and murderers, a true index to point out the general morals of the community?

It is unnecessary to multiply remarks on the next text brought to prove human depravity. (Jer.

xvii. 9) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Admit that it relates to a prevailing trait in the human character; do we not well know, that, in the common use of language, such general expressions are seldom to be understood as universal in their application? They are to be understood in a limited and popular sense. What is more than this, though the text were intended to express a trait of character absolutely universal, it has no more relation to the question respecting the source of human wickedness, whether it be natural or acquired, than any other descriptions of prevalent wickedness in the world. But the total irrelevancy of the text to the purpose, for which it is brought, appears best by considering the subject matter, about which it is introduced. The prophet is stating the safety of trusting in God, and the insecurity of trusting in man. The reason is, that men are deceitful, and not to be depended on. Now this reason would be good, and support the prophet's conclusion, though deceit and treachery were not the universal, though they were not even the general character of men. Were there many to be found, who would deceive and betray, it would be sufficient to justify the prophet, in withdrawing men from their confidence in man, and teaching them to place it in him, who can *never* fail, and will *never* deceive. And it would sufficiently account for his adding in the next verse, "I the Lord search the heart." However deceitful men may be, and able to impose on men, there is

one, who is able to detect, and will not fail to punish.

From the New Testament, the first passage selected, as implying the doctrine under consideration, is the answer of Christ to Nicodemus, (John iii. 3) "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It is contended, (pp. 42, 43) that the universal necessity of regeneration, expressed in this text, implies universal depravity. "That this necessity of a moral renovation arises from the character man possesses in consequence of his natural birth; that all must be born again, because, and only because, all without exception are, by nature, or in consequence of their natural birth, in such a state of moral impurity, as disqualifies them for the enjoyments of heaven, unless they are renewed by the holy spirit."

A single consideration convinces me, that the inference is without foundation, and that the universal necessity of regeneration may consist with original innocency, and exemption from any prevailing tendency, as we are born into the world, to vice rather than virtue. By their natural birth men only become human, reasonable, accountable beings. "What is born of the flesh is flesh." They receive by their natural birth only the human nature. They receive no moral character, but only the faculties and powers, in the exercise of which a moral character is to be formed. The formation of this character introduces them into a new state of being, and by whatever means, and at whatever time it takes place, it may be called, by no very remote

or unusual figure, a new birth ; and those, who have thus acquired a moral character, and received the principles of a spiritual life, in addition to the natural human life, may be said to be born again. Now if this was what Jesus meant in what he said to Nicodemus, it will no more imply original sin, than original holiness. It will only imply the absence or want of that, which was necessary to becoming a subject of the kingdom of God. The terms *new birth, born again, born of the spirit, renewed, become a new man*, are applied with as much propriety to those, who receive the influences of the Gospel, and acquire the character, which it is intended to form, on the supposition of original innocence and purity, as upon that of native depravity and original sinfulness. In each case alike, it expresses a great moral change, and implies the formation of a new character, not possessed before. On the supposition, therefore, that this passage refers, as is generally supposed by interpreters, to that great moral change, which the religion of the Gospel is to produce on those who embrace it, in order to their being fit members of the kingdom of heaven on earth and in glory ; it will be seen to be nothing to the purpose of those, who attempt to build upon it the doctrine of a moral depravity, with which all men are born into the world. It will only imply, that they do not possess by birth that character of personal holiness and positive virtue, which is necessary to their being Christians, fit subjects of the present and future kingdom of God.

The passage, (Rom. v. 12) "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so! death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," is of another kind, and to be shown to have no relation to the subject by other considerations. The whole force of this passage, (if it have any, as relates to this subject,) lies in the last clause, "For that all have sinned." Now if this clause be understood in a sense, which shall prove any thing to the purpose, it will prove the genuine old Calvinistic doctrine, the imputation of Adam's sin. It leads back to the notion of a federal head, of Adam's acting not only on his own responsibility, but for all his posterity; acting in their stead, so that his action was theirs, and they "sinned *in him* and fell *with him* in his first transgression." They are all sinners by the sin of him, their representative, federal head. The myriads who die in earliest infancy, before it is possible for them to perform any act, or to have any volition, either sinful or virtuous, yet die because they are sinners. They are sinners then by the sin of another, by the imputation of sin to them; and this is the true doctrine of Calvinism; and this, it seems to me, is also the doctrine of Dr. Woods, notwithstanding his explicit rejection of it, as stated in words. For, besides that he acquiesces in the qualified statement of Stapfer, (p. 45) (which, after all, must mean the doctrine of imputation in its full extent, if it have any intelligible meaning; since God's giving Adam a *posterity* like himself, if it mean any thing to the



purpose, must mean *simmers* like himself;) besides this, he asserts, that the Apostle's reasoning goes on the ground, that (p. 46) "Adam's transgression had, in the plan of the divine administration, such a relation to his posterity, that in consequence of it, they were *constituted sinners*, and subjected to death and all other sufferings, as *penal evils*." Now if the posterity of Adam being *constituted sinners*, and subjected to all sufferings, as *penal evils*, that is, as punishments, in consequence of his transgression, mean any thing to the purpose for which it is introduced, and yet short of the common Calvinistic notion of imputation, I am unable to perceive what it is, and it needs explanation, and a more definite statement, than I have seen.

But I am persuaded the passage has no such meaning. It is a single phrase taken away from its connexion, and what is more, out of the middle of an argument. Did it therefore, as it does not, express distinctly our original native depravity, it would give very little satisfaction alone; for there is no sentiment so absurd, that it may not be supported by single sentences, thus detached from the connexion in which they are used. But I have observed that in its most obvious sense it expresses no such native corruption. Understood literally, the only assertion it contains with certainty is that of a fact, which none will deny, the universality of sin, that *all* have sinned. Now the nature of the universality intended to be asserted, in this, as in every case, is to be learned from the circumstances of the case. All who are *capable of sinning*, all *as*

soon as they are capable of it, all as soon as they are *moral agents*. Such limitations of the sense of universal expressions in other cases are constantly occurring. Were all the inhabitants of a country required to take an oath of allegiance to the government ; the requisition would be considered as complied with, though no infants and small children had taken the oath, and all would be considered as included under its obligation. But there is another consideration, which ought to prevent this text from being considered of any weight on the subject. The whole passage in which it stands is one of the most intricate and difficult in the New Testament. The phrase,\* on which so much is made to depend, admits equally well of several different translations, each of which will give it a different meaning ; and its connexion with the passage in which it stands is not such, as to help us, to any degree of certainty, in determining by which version its true sense is expressed. Dr. Woods himself, “allows it to be in some respects very obscure.” He will doubtless admit then, that the support derived to a doctrine,

\* 'Εφ' ᾧ, in our translation, “for that,” has been rendered by the several phrases, *because, inasmuch as, as far as, in whom, unto which, after whom, on account of whom*. When meanings so various are assigned to this text by Schleusner, Elsner, Taylor, Doddridge, Whitby, and Macknight, I am justified in attributing to it a degree of obscurity and uncertainty, which should prevent it from being alleged with much confidence in proof of any doctrine, which it may be supposed to express.

depending on any particular translation of this text, or any particular meaning assigned to it, will be of very little value ; of none indeed any farther, than it receives support itself from other plainer passages.

Ephesians ii. 3, "And were by nature children of wrath, even as others." The connexion and circumstances of the case show the meaning of this verse, and that it furnishes no proof of inbred moral corruption, but only of corrupt and wicked habits. It refers to the former state of Jews as well as heathen, before their conversion to Christianity. In that state, they were all alike children of wrath, deserving of wrath, not as they came into the world, not as they came from their Maker's hand, but as they became by the habits, and customs, and practices of that state into which they were born ; which was a state of nature, as compared with the state of grace, into which they were introduced by Christianity. What they were before they became Christians, they were by nature ; what they became afterward, was by the grace of God, which appeared bringing salvation. The state of nature was that, into which they came by their birth ; as distinguished from the state of grace into which they came, when they embraced Christianity. When they received Christianity, they were born again, born of water by their baptism, born of the spirit by receiving the spirit of Christianity, by being renewed in the temper of their mind. Then they were no longer children of wrath, when the new

birth was completed, and their religion had produced all its moral effects.

According to this view of the subject, the state of nature has no reference to what a man brings into the world with him, but it stands opposed to a state of grace. It is that state in which all are, Jews as well as Gentiles, before they become Christians. This language of the Apostle, like much of that in the Epistles, referring to the same subject, relates to men, as bodies of men, not as individuals. It compares them together as bodies, not as individuals. It speaks of them *generally*, as in their heathen and Jewish state, and then in their Christian state. In the former "dead in sin," in the latter "quickened, and raised up," and (v. 5, 6) "made to sit together in heavenly places."

The former, (12, 13) "Strangers, aliens, without God, without hope, afar off;" the latter, "made nigh by the blood of Christ."

The former, (19) "Strangers and foreigners;" the latter, "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

The former, (3, 1) "children of wrath, having their conversation in the lusts of the flesh, dead in trespasses and sins;" the latter, (4, 5, 10) "by the rich mercy of God, quickened, saved by grace, created by Christ Jesus unto good works."

The whole of this refers to the same thing; not to the personal condition of individuals as such, but to that of the whole body of Christians, as quickened and raised from the moral and spiritual death of

their original Jewish and heathen state ; as delivered from the state of wrath, in which they had lived from their birth ; and, by the rich mercy of God and the faith of the Gospel, made to sit together in heavenly places, that is, to enjoy all the privileges and hopes of Christians.

It has no reference therefore to the state in which persons are born into the world in all ages. Those now born into the world, in Christian lands, are not in the same sense that these Ephesians were, *children of wrath by nature*, but as these same Ephesians were, after their conversion to Christianity, *saved by the grace of God, quickened, raised from the dead, made nigh by the blood of Christ, fellow-citizens with the saints, of the household of God.*

All this language was applied to the Ephesians universally after their conversion, and all of it is as applicable universally now to those, who are Christians by birth, as distinguished from those, who are heathen by birth.

The phrase we are considering then must be seen to be wholly inapplicable to the purpose for which it is alleged.

We are called upon by the advocates for the doctrine of depravity to show, that it is inconsistent with the moral perfection of God ; that it is not taught in the scriptures ; and that all the wickedness in the world may be accounted for without admitting the doctrine.

With respect to the first, I might satisfy myself with saying, that it belongs to those, who maintain

the doctrine, to prove its consistency with the moral perfection of God. But I have no wish to avail myself of the right, which every one has, who is called upon to prove a negative, of throwing back the burden of proof. It is one of the cases in which the negative is susceptible of satisfactory proof.

When we charge the common doctrine of depravity with being inconsistent with the moral character of God, it is, as taken in connexion with the rest of the system, of which it makes a part. It is the whole system together, that we maintain is incapable of being defended in consistency with the moral attributes of the Author of our being. Whatever the nature of man be, it is such as he received at the hand of his Maker. Whatever tendency and proneness to evil there may be in him, as he is born into the world, it is no greater than his Maker gave him. We assert then that no guilt, no fault can be attributed to him by his Maker for such proneness. If God be a just being, he cannot be displeased with him for being what he made him. If he be a good being, he cannot punish him for it. To subject him to *penal evils* for a propensity to sin, born with him in consequence of his descent from a sinful ancestor, is not the less cruel and unjust for his being *voluntary* in following that propensity, unless he had also the natural or communicated power to resist it. If he have that power, then he becomes guilty and deserving of punishment, so soon as in the indulgence of the propensity he actually becomes a sinner, but no sooner. Till then, even on the supposition above, no guilt is incurred. The

propensity itself is no sin, and implies no guilt. And afterward the justice of his subjection to penal evils depends on his power of being and acting otherwise than he does. Had he no power to be, to feel, and to act otherwise than he does, he could not be guilty and deserving of punishment for continuing in his present state. But according to the scheme, which assumes to be that of Orthodoxy, those who are the subjects of this innate moral depravity, inclination to evil, and wholly "wrong state of the moral affections and actions," (p. 31) are utterly incapable of doing any thing toward producing in themselves a moral change, or which shall be a reason with God for granting to them that grace, which is necessary to their regeneration and sanctification. It is only the irresistible influence of the spirit of God, which can renew and change their nature. Now we assert, that until this grace has been imparted and resisted, there can be no blame-worthiness. Beings so situated may be the objects of pity to the Author of their being, and his pity may be manifested in bringing suffering upon them in the way of discipline, for the purpose of promoting their renovation, and bringing them to a state of holiness : but it cannot be inflicted by a just being as punishment. Now, if I rightly understand the scheme of Calvinism, divine punishments are not, according to that scheme, disciplinary, but vindictive. God punishes his offending creatures, not to reform them, but to vindicate his authority. The sufferings of the wicked have no tendency to reform, but rather to

harden and confirm them in their opposition to God and their duty.

Now, however consistent with justice may be the infliction of vindictive punishment, where it is in the power of the subject of it to be different from what he is, and to act otherwise than he does; it is contended that it cannot be so, where the guilt to be punished is inbred, a part of man's original nature, such as he came from the Creator's hands; where, in fact, the sinner is as his Maker sent him into the world, not as he has made himself by his own act, by the abuse, or neglect, or perversion of his power, and his faculties and affections.

That the doctrine is not contained in the scriptures I have endeavoured to show, by showing the insufficiency of the several texts from the Old and New Testament, on which Dr. Woods relies for its support; and that they admit of a satisfactory interpretation, which gives no countenance to it. I know very well, that these are not the only texts which are supposed to relate to the subject; but I do not know that any others are thought to have more weight, or to present greater difficulties. I have limited myself to these, solely from a wish not to extend the discussion beyond what was rendered necessary, by the course pursued by Dr. Woods; and presuming that the texts, which he has selected, were those on which he would place his chief reliance.

When the extent and prevalence of wickedness in the world are urged as indicating an original inherent corruption, and we are called upon to ac-



count for it in a satisfactory manner, without admitting the orthodox doctrine of depravity, I shall think it sufficient to refer you to the account which I have given of our moral constitution, and the state of trial in which we are placed. Being, by the whole of our nature and condition, equally capable of virtue and of vice, of a right and of a wrong course; it is no more difficult to account for the actual existence of the highest, than of the lowest degree of either. But I have also another consideration to suggest. It will not, I suppose, be pretended, that our first parents were, previous to their fall, subjects of the same moral depravity, which is attributed to their descendants. It will be admitted that they were created innocent and pure, "in the image of God in righteousness and holiness; yet they became sinners. Now it belongs to him, who urges the wickedness of mankind as a proof of innate original depravity, to account for the sin of our first parents, who are admitted to have been created, not only in a state of innocence, but of positive holiness.

I have one only remark more, which I wish to make in conclusion upon this subject. The doctrine, which I have been considering in this letter, Dr. Woods styles, (p. 31) his "humbling conclusion." In this he intimates, what is often more distinctly expressed by orthodox writers, that the doctrine is of a more humbling nature, more expressive of self-abasement, and of a sense of human demerit and unworthiness, than that which declares our nature to be originally pure, innocent, free from enmity to

God, and from an inclination only to evil. But with how little justice this is claimed, I am persuaded you will be convinced, by a moment's reflection. Can that be thought a more humbling doctrine, which traces all our wicked actions up to an original constitution, given us at first by our Maker, and a depravity of nature which he gave us when he gave us being ; than that which attributes all our sins to our own neglect, and abuse, and perversion of the gifts of God ? We have certainly no cause to feel ourselves humbled under a sense of any thing that we are by nature. We have occasion to be ashamed only of what we have become by practice. For the nature God has given us no sentiment but that of gratitude is due. Humility and self-condemnation should spring only from the consciousness of a course of life not answering to the powers, and faculties, and privileges of our nature. What God has made us, we should think of with unmingled satisfaction ; what we have made ourselves, we cannot think of with too deep regret, and sorrow, and shame.

## LETTER IV.

IN the system of Orthodoxy defended by Dr. Woods, the doctrine of Election stands in immediate and close connexion with that of the total depravity of human nature, and is brought forward by him the next in order. He seems to enter upon the discussion of this subject with the impression, that he has strong prepossessions to encounter, and that these prepossessions are not without foundation. "I acknowledge," he says (p. 52) "that orthodox writers and preachers of high repute, but deficient in judgment, have, in some instances, exhibited the doctrine in a manner, which has given too much occasion for these prepossessions; and too much occasion for this author [Mr. Channing] to think, that the doctrine is inconsistent with the moral perfection of God." Again, (p. 63) "orthodox writers have not unfrequently made use of expressions, which, at first view, may seem to furnish occasion for some of the heavy charges brought against us by our opposers. But for the rash, unqualified expressions of men, who have become hot and violent by controversy, we are not to be held responsible. We here enter our solemn protest against the language, which has sometimes been employed, and the conceptions which have sometimes been entertained on this subject by men, who have been denominated Calvinists." Again, (p. 79) "I am willing to concede, that *those views* of the doctrine of Election, against which Whitby and

many other respectable writers direct their principal arguments, are *justly liable to objection.*” From these passages one might be led to suppose, that those, whose opinions Dr. Woods professes to represent, maintain the doctrine of Election in some qualified sense, and not as it is to be found in the popular writers, and confessions. And in this he would be confirmed by the statement at the close of the discussion. (p. 81) “ You now see what we mean by the doctrine of Election, and in what manner we believe it. *As the result of his own unsearchable wisdom and grace, and for reasons which relate to the great ends of his administration, God eternally purposed to save a great number of our race, and purposed to save them precisely in the manner in which he actually does save them.*” From this form of the doctrine, I presume no Unitarian would dissent; and were there nothing in the Letters of Dr. Woods to show that the orthodox faith is something more than is here expressed, one would have supposed he might have been spared the labour of any formal defence of it against objection, and all that solicitude which he seems to have felt, “ in disclosing to his readers with the utmost frankness his inmost thoughts upon the subject.” (p. 82.)

If this is a complete statement of the doctrine of Election, as it is understood by the Orthodox, and if Dr. Woods and those whom he represents, and for whom he professes to speak, do not maintain the opinions against which the Sermon of Mr. Channing is directed, there seems to have been no good reason, why he should feel himself concerned at all

in the charge. *Calvinists* only, who *do* maintain them, can fairly consider their opinions as attacked, and themselves called upon to defend them.

But Dr. Woods has no where informed us, who those “orthodox writers of high repute” are, who have exposed the doctrine to objection by their injudicious exhibitions of it; nor has he told us in what respects they have given a false representation of it. It is to be regretted that he did not think it necessary to do this, as he must perceive how much it is calculated to perplex, and how much it may mislead, his readers. For, as a simple statement drawn from the several parts of his letters will show, it cannot have been his design to express his dissent from the *doctrine* of Election as expressed in the strongest language of orthodox writers; but only to guard against *the impression*, which he supposes the strong and naked statement of it may be likely to make.

The following is the statement of this doctrine by the Westminster Divines, as it stands in their Confession of Faith, and more briefly in the Assembly’s Catechism.

“God did from all eternity freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”

“By the decree of God some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.”

“These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”

“Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing, in the creature, as conditions or causes, moving him thereunto.”

“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ, &c. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, &c. but the elect only.”

“The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin.”

I will now place before you, in the best manner I am able, such a view of Dr. Woods' opinions upon the subject, as is to be found in scattered passages through his seventh and eighth letters.

“The Father has given to Christ a part of the human race, and those, who have thus been given to Christ, are the persons, who shall have eternal life ;” (p. 54) and this, he goes on to prove at large, “denotes *all who shall finally be saved.*” (p. 55.)

“In every case, a person’s being given to Christ *secures* his coming to Christ ; and, when Christ speaks of those, who were given him of the Father, he includes the whole number that shall be saved.” (p. 56.)

“God has a *purpose, choice, will, and good pleasure*, respecting those who are saved ; a *purpose or choice*, which was in the mind of God before they existed ; a purpose, which does not rest upon any personal merit in those, who are its objects ; of grace, excluding *all works of righteousness* from having any concern in this subject.” (p. 57.)

“Nothing is effected by the efforts of man, but every thing depends on the mercy of God.” (p. 59.)

“The sovereign purpose of God relates to man’s eternal interests, to their religious character and salvation.”.....“I could, as I think, make it appear, that the doctrine of God’s sovereign Election is the only doctrine, which accounts satisfactorily for *the actual difference, which exists between true believers, and the rest of the world.*” (pp. 61, 62.)

“We hold it as a fact, universally, that impenitent, unrenewed sinners do no good work, which God regards as a condition of their being renewed, or on account of which he has promised them regeneration : that, in all cases, he calls and renews them according to his own purpose and grace.” (pp. 67, 68.)

“We believe that those, who are chosen of God to salvation, are not chosen because they were, in themselves, more worthy of this blessing than

others, that God looked upon their moral feelings and conduct with the same disapprobation, and had the same view of their ill desert, and that he chose them, as we may say, *for reasons of state*; for general reasons in his government, which he has not revealed."...“The purpose and administration of God are, in this respect, different from what our wisdom would dictate, or our affections choose; they cannot be accounted for by any principles known to us, but result from the infinite perfection of God, and are conformed to reasons, which he has concealed in his own mind.” (p. 74.)

If you will compare these passages with those before quoted from the Westminster Confession, you will find that they differ from each other only in the degree of clearness and explicitness, with which the same doctrine is expressed.

I shall now endeavour to show, that the “method of designating the heirs of salvation,” which this doctrine implies, can neither be reconciled with our natural notions of the moral character of God, derived from the use of the faculties he has given us, and our observation of his conduct in the government of the world; nor with what he has made known to us of his character, and purposes, and government in the christian revelation.

How repugnant this doctrine is to our natural reason, Dr. Woods himself seems to be fully sensible. “If it were put to my natural reason,” he says, (p. 54) “to judge by its own light respecting what is called the doctrine of Election, my judgment



might agree with the judgment of those, who reject the doctrine. If the question were, what difficulties attend the doctrine, I might perhaps bring forward as many as others."

Now, as God is the Author of our being, and as that portion of reason, which we have, was given us by him for our guide, it is certainly very remarkable, and what we should not expect, that instead of indicating to us truly his character, and dispositions, and purposes, so far as it gives us any information, it should universally mislead us respecting them. Following the light of our reason, and the natural impulse of our feelings, we find it impossible to imagine, that the Author of our being, the common Parent of all, can regard and treat his offspring in the manner, which the doctrine in question attributes to him. That, without any foreseen difference of character and desert in men, before he had brought them into being, he should regard some with complacency and love, and the rest with disapprobation, and hatred, and wrath; and, without any reference to the future use or abuse of their nature, should appoint some to everlasting happiness, and the rest to everlasting misery; and that this appointment, entirely arbitrary, for which no reason is to be assigned, but his sovereign will, should be the cause and not the consequence of the holiness of the one, and of the defect of holiness of the other. A man, who should do what this doctrine attributes to God, I will not say toward his own offspring, but toward any beings that were dependent

on him, and whose destiny was at his disposal, would be regarded as a monster of malevolence, and cruelty, and caprice. It is incredible that the Author of our being should thus have formed us with an understanding and moral feelings to lead us without fail to condemn the measures and the principles of the government of him, who so made us.

Will it be said that this repugnance which we feel to the doctrine in question is one of the proofs of the corruption of our nature? Yet whatever that nature may be, it is such as he gave us. And however imperfect our reason, it is what he gave to be our guide. It is the only immediate guide he has given us; and it is that, which must be the ultimate judge of the evidence, and of the nature and value, of any notices which he may give of his will and purposes, by his providence or his word. Can it have been the design of the Apostle to put down our reason, our moral feelings, and natural conscience, as seems to be intimated in the pamphlet, “*by the appalling rebuke, Who art thou that repliest against God?*” But who is the man, that in the truest sense is chargeable with replying against God? Is it not he, who would set aside, as false and dangerous, the guide he has given to all for the direction of life? Is it not he, who refuses to listen to the voice, by which he speaks to all? Who calls in question the notices he gives of himself and of the principles of his government, in the only universal revelation that he has made of himself? He, it seems to me, *replies against God*, who

rejects or undervalues the notices, which he has in any way given us, of himself or of the principles of his government. Not less he, who refuses to follow reason and natural conscience, than he, who will not submit to the demands of a written revelation. Not less he, who turns his back upon the works of God, than he, who closes his eyes against his written word.

But my objection to the orthodox doctrine of Election is grounded not solely on its being irreconcilable with our reason and moral feelings; I find it not more easy to reconcile it with the instructions of the holy scriptures. I look to the general scope of the sacred writings, as regards the disposition of the Author of nature toward his creatures, and the principles of his government; and I find nothing to support this doctrine, but much with which it seems to be wholly incompatible. I ask how this sovereign appointment of the everlasting condition of men, "excluding all works of righteousness, as having any concern in it," and with reference to which "nothing is effected by the efforts of men," can be shown to consist with all that we find in the scriptures so clearly implying, that something is depending on the exertions men will make, and the part they will act; for, according to this doctrine, what they are to be and how they are to act is determined beforehand, without any reference to such exertions; with all that implies the influence of motives, since it is no such influence of motive, but "God's sovereign election, that is to account for the actual difference between true believers, and the

rest of the world ;” with all that implies guilt, ill desert, blame-worthiness in the unholy, disobedient, and impenitent ; for how can men be guilty of being what they were made to be ? How are they deserving of blame for remaining in that moral state, in which it was determined by the sovereign appointment of God, that they should remain ? With all those promises, threatenings, warnings, admonitions, exhortations, and entreaties, which imply in those, to whom they are addressed, a power of being influenced ; with all that implies, that men are capable of duty and obligation, and are the proper subjects of praise and blame, and of reward and punishment ?

This charge of inconsistency with the general scope of the scriptures, and the doctrine every where taught or implied in the sacred writings, has never been removed ; nor can it be, I am persuaded, but by violating the plainest principles in the interpretation of language.

There is another view, in which this doctrine is at variance with what the scriptures every where present to us. I mean the righteous and benevolent character of the Author of our being. It represents him to us as a cruel and unjust being, exacting endless punishment for sins committed in following the nature he had given, and acting in pursuance of his decree. It represents him, as arbitrary and partial in his distributions ; making a distinction the most momentous that can be imagined in his treatment of those, between whom there was no difference of character or of desert as the ground of the

distinction ; from his mere sovereign will and good pleasure, ordaining *these* to eternal blessedness and glory, and appointing *those* to endless and hopeless misery. That it is the *righteous* only, who will thus be raised to glory, and the *wicked* only, who will be the subjects of condemnation, will make no difference in the case ; since, according to the doctrine we are considering, it is not merely an absolute appointment to salvation on the one hand, and to condemnation on the other ; but also to the different dispositions, character, and course of life, which are to have these opposite results. Those, and those only, who are ordained to eternal life, are also ordained to be effectually called, to be regenerated by irresistible grace, and thus to be brought, not by any thing they do, or can do themselves, but solely by the immediate power of God, out of that state of sin, in which they are by nature, to that holiness, which is to qualify them for salvation. The rest of mankind, “ passed by, and ordained to dishonour and wrath for their sins,” have that effectual and irresistible grace withheld from them, which was necessary to their regeneration, and without which it was impossible for them to attain to holiness and salvation.

To say, that those who are appointed to salvation, are chosen from among mankind “ *for reasons of state,*” (p. 74) is to say nothing that is intelligible. But to say, that they are chosen (ib.) “ for reasons, which God has not revealed ;—reasons, which he has concealed in his own mind ; such as cannot be accounted for by any principle known to us,” is something more.

It is a position, I think, unsupported by proof, and confuted distinctly by what we constantly meet with in the New Testament. In the appointment to privileges, means, and external condition, God has indeed given no account of his motives; nor assigned his reasons for the infinite variety that appears. He has exercised an absolute sovereignty, of which no account is given, and the reasons of which we are not competent to understand. But it is clearly otherwise as to the final condition of men. So far is that from being determined *by reasons of state, which he has not revealed*, that the reasons, upon which the final salvation or condemnation of every man is to take place, are distinctly assigned by our Saviour and his Apostles; not once only, but as often as they have occasion to speak of the final distinctions that are to be made between men. Those distinctions, we are again and again told, are to be wholly according to the difference of moral character. It is that *these* are righteous, and *those* wicked; *these* have done well, and *those* have done ill; *these* have been faithful, and *those* unfaithful. So far are the reasons of the final distinction to be made between those who are saved, and those who perish, from being concealed in the divine mind, that nothing is more distinctly made known. The New Testament is full of it.

Nor is it with any better reason said, that, “in this respect, the purpose and administration of God are different from what our wisdom would dictate, or our affections choose.” They are precisely what the wisdom and the affections of every man in their

uncorrupted, unperturbed state, would approve and concur in. And they are accounted for by principles well known to us ; principles of eternal and immutable justice. Not reasons which he has concealed in his own mind, but such as he has made us perfectly capable of understanding ; and such as he has clearly revealed to us in his word.

But, though the general tenor of scripture seems so foreign from the doctrine we are considering, and not easily reconciled with it, there are particular texts in which it is thought to be expressly taught, or so clearly implied, that their force cannot be evaded.

The first text alleged by Professor Woods, in the pamphlet before me, is (John xvii. 2) "That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him," and (John vi. 37, 39) "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. And this is the Father's will, who sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."

With respect to the first of these, it cannot have been our Saviour's intention to declare, that a certain, definite number of mankind were appointed by the Father to receive the benefit of his mediation and sacrifice, and obtain salvation, exclusive of all others ; and without any thing in them, as the ground of this preference and choice, for the reasons that follow.

In the discourse with his disciples, (ch. xv.) which stands in immediate connexion with the

prayer, of which this text is a part, he addresses the same persons, of whom he here speaks as "given him of the Father," in language implying, that they might "abide in him, and bring forth much fruit," or, failing to abide in him, might be "taken away, cast forth, cast into the fire and burned." As those who, though chosen and ordained, might or might not keep the commands, and abide in the love of him, who had thus chosen and ordained them. But, according to the doctrine in question, there could be no such contingency in the case. All who are thus given, chosen, ordained, and those only, are to bring forth fruit, to keep his commands, to abide in his love, to have eternal life.

In this same discourse, again, (ch. xvi. 27) we meet with the following sentence. "For the Father himself loveth you, *because ye have loved me*, and have believed that I came out from God." Here the love of God is represented, not as the cause, but the consequence, of the faith and love of the disciples, and the plain and obvious meaning of the texts in question, in their connexion with this is, that they were given to Christ, not by an arbitrary selection of them from the mass of Jews, without any thing in their character and disposition leading to the choice; but, because they were seen to be fit subjects for the kingdom of God, ready to receive the faith of the Gospel when offered to them, having already something of the christian disposition and character, already manifesting an obedient temper, as expressed (ch. xvii. 6,) they were already children of God, and were given to Christ, and



came to him, because they were God's in a sense, in which the rest of the world were not; and were then chosen, and ordained to partake in the final benefits of the Gospel, because of their faith and fidelity. This interpretation renders the whole discourse, and the following prayer, consistent throughout in the several parts, and consistent with the moral character of God, and the moral state of man, as a free and accountable being. With the other interpretation, I do not perceive how the texts that have been mentioned can be fairly reconciled. If, by *those given to Christ*, we are to understand, as Dr. Woods asserts, (p. 54) "a certain part of the human race, who are to have eternal life, and those, denoting *all*, to whom Christ will actually give eternal life," and as his argument requires, and as he elsewhere states with sufficient distinctness, this choice and appointment to Christian faith, obedience, and eternal life, is wholly independent of any thing in them as the ground of this distinction from the rest of the world, it is impossible to see with what propriety it could be said, that "God loved them, because of their faith and love to Christ," for his distinguishing love was, by that supposition, the cause of their faith, &c.; or how any intimations could be given, that something was yet depending upon themselves; that it yet depended on themselves, whether they should abide in Christ, keep his commandments, continue in his love, and share in the great salvation; for the appointment to all this was absolute, and without any condition on their part, as the ground of it. Besides,

I observe that other language of our Saviour in the discourses recorded by this same Evangelist, is equally favourable to the supposition, "that coming to Christ, believing on him, and having eternal life, are events, not flowing from a sovereign unconditional appointment, but the result of a faithful use of means, in the exercise of a right disposition; and that the difference of character thus appearing between them, and others who neglect to come, who refuse to believe and obey, and fail of eternal life, is the ground and not the consequence of their being chosen, given to Christ, and ordained to eternal life. Thus, (John iii. 19) the ground of men's condemnation is, not an irrespective decree of God, "but their hating the light, loving the darkness, because their deeds are evil." It is their being in character and disposition opposite to those, who escape the condemnation, because they do the truth, and willingly come to the light.

Thus it is, that the reason assigned, and, as is clearly implied, the *criminal reason* why the unbelieving Jews rejected the Gospel (John v. 40) was, not that they were ordained to this condemnation without any thing in them, by which they were distinguished from those, who accepted the invitation; but because they wilfully rejected the Gospel, and refused the eternal life it offered. "Ye *will* not come unto me, that ye might have life." Again, the same great moral ground of distinction appears in the declaration, (John vii. 17) "If any man *will do his will*, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Those, who are given to

Christ, chosen, ordained, who are to know of his doctrine, to believe in him, and thus to obtain eternal life, are those, who are well disposed to it, who have an obedient temper, who are *willing to do his will*.

The observations which have been applied to this text are equally applicable to the other text under consideration. (John vi. 27) "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;" that is, those only are given to him of the Father, those only are to receive the final blessings of the Gospel, who come to Christ. It was so when the Gospel was first promulgated. The humble, the pious, the teachable received the Gospel; all those who were of God. The proud, the irreligious rejected it; those who were not of God, but of the world. It has been so in every subsequent age.

And none of those who thus come, bringing with them the spirit of the Gospel, abiding in it, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, none of these will he cast off. Of all those, thus given to him, thus coming to him, thus abiding in him, thus bringing forth fruit, it is the Father's will that he should lose nothing.

From this expression in the text, however, as well as the other, an unwarrantable inference is probably drawn; that of the absolute certainty of the final salvation of all those persons, concerning whom it is spoken. But this form of words was evidently intended to express, not the particular decree, but the general purpose of heaven; not the specific effect, which is without fail to be produced,

but the object and design of the divine dispensation ; to be understood with similar limitations with those, which we apply to the expression, (1 Tim. ii. 4) “ who will have all men to be saved.” Not that every human being will be actually saved, in the sense in which *saved* is here used, but that the salvation of all was the object and design ; that the offer of it was made to all, an offer which yet might be rejected. Again, (Col. i. 23) “ the gospel, which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.” Here the literal meaning of the sentence is not the true meaning. The Gospel had not been preached to every living creature. But the direction of the Saviour to his disciples was to preach it to every creature, that is, to *all men*. It was intended in general for all. None were excepted in the commission ; none were passed by in the execution. As far as the design of the commission had been accomplished, it had been done agreeably to the direction of the Saviour. To these instances many others might be added to show, that expressions of *universal* import are often, as in the text in question, to be interpreted only in a *general sense* ; and that they are frequently used to express, not an absolute decree, but a purpose or design depending on contingences, and which *may in fact* be either universal or only general. And that the example we are considering is clearly of this kind, and that it does not warrant the use, that has been made of it, we have the farther positive proof in this circumstance ; that notwithstanding this unqualified expression, *one* of the persons given to Christ had been lost. “ Those

that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." The son of perdition, it is here clearly implied, had been given to Christ in the sense of the passage, and yet had been lost. The declaration then, "It is the Father's will that he should lose nothing," is manifestly designed to express, not a specific personal decree, but the general purpose and design.

The next passage quoted by Dr. Woods to prove an absolute personal election to salvation is Ephesians i. 3—11. "Blessed be the God and Father," &c. To all the observations made by Dr. Woods on this passage, I give my entire concurrence; yet have no hesitation in asserting, what I hope satisfactorily to prove, that it has no relation to the doctrine, which he has brought it to support.

It refers not to individuals as such, but to the Christian community. Not to final salvation, but to Christian privileges. In the first place, the Epistle is addressed to the whole Christian community at Ephesus, without any intimation, that any expressions in it are applicable to some and not to others. The terms *saints* and *faithful in Christ Jesus*, (ver. 1) are applied alike to all, and are evidently to be understood as terms which designate the whole company of believers, and external professors, without any reference to the personal character of any, as individuals. It is again, in the name of the whole Christian community, Jews and Gentiles, that the Apostle speaks, when he says, that "God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, chosen us in *him* [that is, Christ] before the

foundation of the world, predestinated us to the adoption of children, predestinated us according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (ver. 3, 4, 5, 11) That this choice or predestination was not that of individuals to eternal life, but of all, who received the christian faith, to the profession and privileges of the Gospel, (besides its being thus generally addressed, and in the name of Christians at large and universally) appears still further from other expressions, addressed in the same manner. It is for these same persons, saints, faithful, chosen, predestinated, that the Apostle thought it needful very devoutly and earnestly to pray to God, "that they might be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith, that they might be rooted and grounded in love ;" very suitable to be addressed to professed believers as a promiscuous body : but such as we should hardly expect, if the persons designated were by the very designation understood to consist only of persons certainly chosen to eternal life, and were already certainly grounded in love, were already strengthened in the inner man, had already Christ dwelling in their hearts by love.

Further, these same persons, he thinks it proper to exhort, (ch. iv. 1) "to walk worthy of the vocation with which they were called," "to walk henceforth, not as other Gentiles walk," (ver. 17) "but to put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of their mind,

and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," and "not to grieve the holy spirit of God." (ver. 22, 23, 24, 30.) Implying that they are liable to retain still their heathen character, notwithstanding their Christian profession; that they *may* still pursue the former conversation, which, by their profession, they have renounced; that they are in danger of failing to put off the old man, and to be, as their Christian profession requires, "renewed in righteousness and true holiness;" that they finally may, instead of following the guidance of the spirit of God, grieve it. Very suitable, therefore, to be addressed to the promiscuous body of professing Christians; very suitable if by *saints, chosen, predestinated*, this only were meant; but certainly not so, if by these terms were designated persons chosen from eternity to final salvation, and already saints and faithful in the highest and literal sense of the words. *Such*, as distinguished from the rest of the world, are not the proper subjects of exhortation to walk worthy of their Christian vocation; for the very terms applied to them imply that they cannot fail to do so; being certainly predestinated to life, they are as certainly predestinated to that character and state, to which life is promised. They cannot be exhorted to be renewed and to put on the new man;—for by the supposition against which I am contending, their renewal is already certain. It is what they have no power, either to prevent, or to bring about, or even to accelerate. Their renewal has indeed already taken place; for they are ad-

dressed, not only as chosen and predestinated, but as saints and Christians, which, according to the scheme under consideration, they were not, till they were renewed. And with what propriety can such be exhorted “not to grieve the holy spirit of God?”

The next, and only other passage, to which Dr. Woods has referred for the direct proof of the doctrine of sovereign personal election to eternal life, is that contained in Romans ix. 11—24. A similar method of investigation to that, which was applied to the passage in Ephesians, will convince you, I think, that this is as little to the purpose as the other; and that it has no relation to an election to eternal life, but only to the privileges of the Gospel.

This will appear to you in the first place by an attention to the general scope and design of the Epistle, the subject of which was suggested by the great controversy of that age, respecting the extension of Christianity to the Gentiles, and their admission to its privileges and hopes, without being subjected to the observance of the Mosaic ritual. The Apostle combats the exclusive spirit of his Jewish brethren, by showing them, that those distinctions, on which they so valued themselves, as the chosen people of God, were done away; that Gentiles were admitted to the same rights, and to the opportunity of securing the final favour of Heaven on the same terms with them.

The Jews, as descendants of Abraham, disciples of Moses, children of the covenant and of the promises, enjoyed a high distinction and valuable privi-



leges. But these privileges were no security of their final acceptance with God. They were disciplinary and conditional. The knowledge of the law would be of no avail to those, who did not faithfully observe it. The sign of the covenant would not save those, who should violate it. The oracles of God, which were committed to them, would but enhance the guilt and the condemnation of those, who, with all their superior light and motives, lived no better than ignorant heathen.

On the other hand, the Gentiles, without the light of the written law, and without the sign of the covenant, the external mark of being the people of God; if, guided by the light they had, (Rom. ii. 26, 27, 29) they fulfilled the law by a virtuous life, thus showing practically "the work of the law written in the heart," (ver. 15) would secure that acceptance of God, of Him, "with whom is no respect of persons," (ver. 11) and "who will render to every man according to his deeds," (ver. 6) which the Jew must lose, who being "a Jew outwardly" only, (ver. 28) and relying on the letter and circumcision, was emboldened to neglect its moral design, and to live as a heathen. The final condition of every individual, whether Jew or Gentile, was to depend on individual personal character. (ver. 5—10) "Indignation and wrath to every soul of man that doth evil: glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew, and also to the Gentile."

Now with this general scope and design of the first part of the Epistle, that interpretation of the

ix. ch. which refers “the purpose of God, according to election,” (ver. 11 et seq.) to an unconditional election of individuals to eternal life, seems to be wholly irreconcilable : whereas, that, which refers it to an appointment, free and unconditional, to the participation of privileges, not only comports well with the general design of the Epistle, but makes the latter part of it a continuation of the former, and a completion of the design, that prevails in the whole preceding part.

This appears again not less clearly, when we come to a separate examination of the passage itself.

The first instance mentioned of the accomplishment of “the purpose of God according to election,” is that of the appointment of Isaac, and pretermis- sion of Ishmael and the other children of Abraham. But what purpose of God was accomplished by this? Not the salvation of Isaac, but the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham in the whole series of dispensa- tions for promoting the knowledge of God and true religion in the world ; and especially in raising up one from among his descendants, in whom “all the families of the earth were to be blessed.”

The next instance is the choice of Jacob in preference to Esau, a choice which preceded their birth, and could therefore have no respect to their good or ill desert. And this, the whole reasoning of the Apostle assures us, is applied, not to Jacob personally, but to the race descending from him ; and not to them in their personal character, but solely to their designation, as a people, to a certain part in accomplishing the great purposes of heaven.

In this appointment, the same free, sovereign, uncontrolled will was exercised, which is seen in the appointment of all the other circumstances, which make up the state of trial of every human being. It is “the power of the potter over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour.” Upon this interpretation there is room for the appeal, (ver. 20) “shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” Upon that interpretation, which supposes a reference to the final lot of individuals as determined by a decree that has no respect to different desert, the appeal could not be sustained.

In each of these cases we perceive a peculiar propriety in the expressions, which the Apostle applies by way of reflection, (ver. 16) “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” It was the wish of Abraham, that the blessing might be given to his eldest son Ishmael. It was the desire of Isaac, that it should descend with his eldest son Esau. But the will of neither of them was permitted to prevail; nor yet the prompt obedience of Esau, by which he hoped to secure it to himself.

I am ready to admit, with Dr. Woods, that this reflection of the Apostle implies a general principle; but it is a principle to be applied to similar cases only, not those that are dissimilar. Now similar cases are those, and those only, which relate to privileges, opportunities, blessings, which are disciplinary in their design, temporal in their duration, and make a part of human probation. That which

relates directly to final salvation is dissimilar, and the same principle is not to be applied.

The case of Pharaoh is as little to the purpose as either of the others. For when it is said, (ver. 17) "For this same purpose I have raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth;" whether by the phrase, *raised thee up*, be meant, as some suppose, *his recovery* from the effects of the preceding plague, which had been inflicted *on his person* and his people; or as others understand it, his being exalted to high power, and placed in a situation to act so important a part; in either case, there will be no reference to his final personal destiny. For how did God actually show his power in him, and make him the instrument of his glory? It was by giving him the opportunity to act out his character, by allowing full scope for displaying the incorrigible obstinacy of his disposition, and by then inflicting upon him exemplary punishment, for the instruction and warning of mankind; thus making him the instrument of promoting some of the best purposes of heaven, in the free and voluntary exercise of his power.

I should have passed by what is said (p. 72) on the doctrine of Reprobation, as expressing no other sentiment than what all Unitarians, as I believe, hold on the subject, but that I think it calculated (unintentionally I am persuaded, as respects the writer) to mislead the reader, as to the opinions of the Orthodox on that point. Dr. Woods has in fact given us, not as he professes to do, the *doctrine* of

the Orthodox, as to the decree of Reprobation ; but only his *opinion of the character of the doctrine*. He says, “it is the determination of God to punish disobedient subjects *for* their sins, and according to their deserts.” Now this, I observe, is not a statement of the orthodox doctrine, but his opinion of the character of that doctrine. What it belongs to him to state and defend is, not an opinion upon the subject, which he holds in common with all Christians, but that, by which the system he defends is distinguished from others. That opinion I will now state in the language of one of the most approved symbols of Calvinistic faith ; and it is such as follows very clearly from his own statement of the counterpart of the doctrine. “The rest of mankind,” i. e. all but the elect, “God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his *glorious* justice.” Again, “Others, not elected, though they may be called by the ministers of the word, and may have some common operations of the spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved ; much less can men, not professing the christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion, which they do profess : and to assert and maintain that they may, is very

pernicious, and to be detested." (*Westminster Confession.*)

I am very willing to believe that the doctrine, as thus stated in the orthodox confessions, does not make a part of Dr. Woods' faith; though I am unable to perceive with what consistency he can reject it, while he retains the other parts of the system that are connected with it.

If the doctrines of original hereditary depravity, absolute personal election, effectual calling, and special irresistible grace be true, that of reprobation, as stated above, follows of course, and must be true also. Whether it be that Dr. Woods, with a fair and inquiring mind, actually shrinks from this doctrine, because he finds it cannot be defended consistently with the moral character of God: or only thinks it desirable to keep out of view a feature of Calvinism, which shocks our moral feelings more than any other; in either case, I deem it an auspicious circumstance, a favourable omen. Men will not long continue to hold an opinion, after it has got to cause a painful struggle with their moral feelings, such as to dispose them to endeavour to keep it out of sight. They will not suffer themselves to be long encumbered with that, which they are unable to defend or unwilling to avow. Besides this, it cannot fail to open the eyes of men to the difficulties of the other parts of the system, which are intimately connected with this, which necessarily flow from it, and are in fact no better supported by scripture nor by reason than this.

## LETTER V.

FOLLOWING the arrangement adopted by Dr. Woods, the next subject to which I am to call your attention is that of the Atonement. It is a doctrine on which great stress is laid by orthodox writers generally. The author of the Letters addressed to Unitarians says, "If there is any one doctrine of Revelation which the Orthodox distinguish in point of importance from all others, it is the doctrine of Atonement." It must accordingly be thought, that the importance of having clear conceptions and just views on the subject will bear some proportion to the importance of the subject itself. After such an introduction, therefore, to a letter devoted expressly to the discussion of that subject, it was certainly reasonable to expect a distinct statement of the orthodox explanation of the texts of scripture, in which it is supposed to be taught, and a defence of the interpretation by which those texts are understood to express the meaning that is assigned to them. More especially was this to be expected of one, who complains that the opinions of the Orthodox are misrepresented, and who, in their name, disclaims the opinions, which are attributed to them. But in this expectation I am disappointed. There is much complaint of misrepresentation, but I find no distinct statement in what the alleged misrepresentation consists, nor what are the precise opinions maintained by the Orthodox on this subject. I am able to collect but a very imperfect and indistinct

idea, what the scheme, which claims to be Orthodox on this subject, is. It is asserted, that the language used by orthodox writers on this subject, like that used by the sacred writers, is highly figurative, (p. 86, &c.) that it is not to be understood literally, that it does not mean, what it seems to express. It would have greatly assisted us, and possibly put a period to all controversy on the subject, had the writer seen fit to explain the figures, and give the true interpretation of the metaphors, which it is complained have been so misunderstood, and have thus laid the foundation for misrepresentation.

The first charge of misrepresentation is, that the author of the Sermon makes it a part of the orthodox system, “that God took upon him human nature, that he might pay to his own justice the debt of punishment incurred by men, and might enable himself to exercise mercy”—“that he might appease his own anger toward men, or make an infinite satisfaction to his own justice.” The unfairness alleged in this representation is, that it does not recognize the distinction of persons in the Deity, which is maintained by the Orthodox, and it is implied, that if no such distinction do exist, the representation would not be liable to objection, for no objection is made to it on any other ground. It was incumbent then on Dr. Woods, not merely to assert this distinction as an article of the orthodox faith, but to explain *what* it is, and to show its foundation in the language of scripture. The former he has declined, as not being within the scope of



our limited minds (p. 84), the latter, as not falling within his purpose (p. 85), in the discussion of the subject. But until both are done, I can see no ground for complaining of the absurdity charged upon the doctrine. It is a legitimate and necessary consequence of the orthodox faith, that Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent into the world, is the same being with the Father who sent him ; that Christ, who interposed and made an atonement for sinners, is the same being with that God, who, it is alleged, (p. 65) “ would never have saved them without such an interposition.” It was the same God, the same being, who sent, and was sent, who made the atonement, and whose anger was appeased by the atonement, who made satisfaction to offended justice, and whose justice was satisfied. It is not enough to assert, (p. 64) that “ the Father and the Son are *two* as *really* as Moses and Aaron, though not in the same sense, nor in any sense inconsistent with their being one.” It belongs to him, who asserts this, to state intelligibly, what is the nature and import of the distinction here intended ; to explain in what sense *two*, and in what sense *one*. No man knows better than Dr. Woods, that until he has done this, he has done nothing to the purpose. He uses words without meaning, and merely casts a mist, where he is bound to shed light.

The next imputation on the orthodox faith, which Dr. Woods endeavours to remove is, that it conveys to common minds the idea, that “ Christ’s death has an influence in making God placable, or

merciful, in quenching his wrath, and awakening his kindness towards men." Now to vindicate the system, and those who support it, from this charge, it was necessary to show, that the language, in which the doctrine is expressed and enforced by the Orthodox, is not calculated to produce this impression. But has this been done? By no means. The contrary is frankly admitted. It is conceded that the literal sense of the orthodox writings amounts to this. It is *asserted*, indeed, that the doctrine of the Orthodox is the very reverse of this, "that the mercy of God, not the interposition of Christ, was the origin and moving cause of the work of redemption;" (p. 68) "that the mercy or placability of God could neither be produced nor increased by the atonement of Christ." These are noble, correct, scriptural views. We are delighted to find on this point an opinion so highly important, in exact coincidence with that of Unitarians, and one to which they attach a very high degree of importance. We are glad too to find a strong sensibility expressed to the honour of the divine character, and horror at the thought of an opinion, so derogatory to it, as that which is attributed to the influence of the language they use on the subject. But why then does he go on to defend the use of that language, instead of correcting it? Since it is admitted not to be the language of scripture, and that understood literally it does convey the ideas objected to; that it does make the impression at which so much horror is expressed, does express a

doctrine acknowledged to be false and unfounded ; why is it not given up ? Especially as it would, on this point, put an end to all controversy. And why complain that the opinions of the Orthodox are misrepresented, when it is acknowledged that the opinions attributed to them are the literal and obvious meaning of the language they employ ?

It is to little purpose to say, that the figurative language used on this subject, though not the same, resembles that employed by the sacred writers in reference to the same subject. Dr. Woods admits that the language of the sacred writers is highly figurative. He admits too that such boldness of metaphor is peculiar to the Eastern, and particularly to the Hebrew idiom ; (p. 88) and that it is not so contemporaneous to our language. (p. 99) Why, then, will orthodox writers use it without explanation, when it serves to mislead readers and hearers who are not aware of this character of the Eastern languages ; and lead them into so great an error ? And if orthodox writers, instead of explaining the metaphors, so that their true meaning may be understood, “for the purpose of strong impression,” use them as if they were to be understood literally ; and not only so, but further sanction that interpretation by the use of other similar language of the same literal import ; especially if they charge Unitarians with denying or explaining away the doctrine for the very reason, that they explain the language in question as figurative ; can he be surprized that the Orthodox should be supposed to hold the

opinions, which the language literally expresses? Could it be imagined by a plain, honest man, under these circumstances, that while this strong impressive language is constantly used and insisted on, something very different is all the time meant from that which strikes the ear? And, let me ask, does it enter into the minds of common hearers of such language, that, correctly interpreted, it expresses no ideas, which would be “objected to by Unitarians?” (p. 92) It is to be hoped that in future the opinions of Unitarians on this part of the subject will be viewed with less aversion, when we are told from so high authority, that “the language used by orthodox writers is to be understood as highly figurative; that, taken literally, it would impute a character to God, which would excite universal horror; but understood according to the legitimate principles of interpreting metaphors, it teaches the simple truth, that the death of Christ was the means of procuring pardon, or the medium, through which salvation is granted.” (p. 93) Dr. Woods is right in supposing, “that no objection will lie in the minds of Unitarians,” against the doctrine thus expressed. It is the very manner of expressing the influence of the Atonement; which has been adopted by unitarian writers.

Dr. Woods proceeds to the notice of several other modes of expression, the use of which by the Orthodox he supposes to have been misunderstood, in a similar manner, and from the same cause, the misinterpretation of figurative language. When

it is said that Christ bought us, redeemed us by his blood; when he is said to have paid our debt, to have satisfied divine justice, to have redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, and that our sin was imputed to him; when these and other figurative forms of expression are employed to set forth the design and influence of Christ's death, we are told "they are to be interpreted as metaphorical language, according to the nature of the metaphors used, and that against the literal sense, there are many objections." (p. 95) So far there will be no controversy on the part of Unitarians, and it gives us no small satisfaction, that we have here a ground upon which we can stand together. And we are not without hope, that agreeing in this principle on which to proceed, we shall gradually approach nearer together in the result, till there shall no difference remain worth contending about.

But when Dr. Woods proceeds to explain the figures, he seems to have fallen into the same error "of mixing a degree of the literal sense with the metaphorical," which he afterwards mentions, and to which he traces some important mistakes, into which other writers have been led. To perceive this, you have only to compare together the passage (p. 94), in which he professes to explain what is meant by our being bought, redeemed, our debt paid, and divine justice satisfied; with that (p. 96), in which "the notion, that if Christ has made a perfect atonement and satisfied divine

justice, those for whom he has done this are no longer under the same obligations to obey the law, and punishing them for their sins would no longer be just, is attributed to something of a literal sense being applied to the figurative language of Scripture and of orthodox writers. And it is admitted, that “if Christ paid our debt, or the price of our redemption literally, as a friend discharges an insolvent debtor, or purchases the freedom of a slave by the payment of money; it would certainly be an unrighteous thing for us to be held to pay our own debt, or to suffer the evils of servitude.” For in the passage referred to, this is the very representation that is made. “As the debtor is freed from imprisonment by the friend who steps forward and pays his debt, so are sinners freed from punishment by the Saviour who shed his blood for them.” The payment is as literal in the one case as in the other; and I see not how the consequence, consistently with what is admitted above, is to be avoided. The same may be said with respect to the other terms. The consequence is not to be evaded, if our redemption by Christ means, as is there stated, “his delivering us from the punishment of the law by suffering an evil which, so far as the ends of divine government are concerned, was equivalent to the execution of the curse of the law upon transgressors.” (p. 94) The ends of the divine government are answered, the demands of the law are fulfilled. It has no farther demands. When Christ has done and suffered

that which answers the ends of justice in the divine government, the necessity of punishment, so far as those ends are concerned, is superseded. The sinner then is free; exempt alike from obligation, and from danger of punishment. The debt is paid; justice is satisfied; the ends of government are answered by the voluntary substitute. These consequences certainly follow from the manner which Dr. Woods has adopted of explaining the figurative language of the sacred writers.

But the language in question certainly does admit of a fair and unstrained interpretation, which leads to no such consequences. We are declared to have "redemption, the forgiveness of sins, by the blood of Christ." It will help us to the true interpretation of this language to attend to the use of the word *redemption* by the sacred writers in other analogous cases. Literally to redeem is to relieve from forfeiture, or captivity, or slavery, or to rescue from punishment by the payment of a price, and the price thus paid is the ransom. When, by a price paid by some friend, a captive is restored to liberty, or the punishment of a criminal is remitted, whose life was forfeited to the law; in each of these cases there is a redemption in the original meaning and literal sense of the word. In the same manner also, if "Christ delivers us from punishment by suffering an evil, which was equivalent, so far as the ends of the divine government are concerned, to the execution of the curse of

the law upon transgressors," (p. 94) that is a literal redemption, and that and the other correspondent terms, such as *bought* and *ransomed*, are applied, and are to be understood, not in a metaphorical but a literal sense. And here I cannot but observe, that the error complained of, that of mixing a literal with the metaphorical sense of such phrases, consists, not as intimated, (p. 95) "in the manner of reasoning upon them," but in the interpretation of the language itself.

Now it is not difficult in this case to trace the passage of the term in question from its original literal meaning to its metaphorical use. For as the deliverance from captivity or punishment was the principal thing, and the price paid as a ransom only a secondary consideration in making up the complex idea of redemption, it is easy to see how the term came to be used to denote the principal thing alone, where this accessory circumstance was wanting; and thus any kind of deliverance, by a very common change in the use of language, was called a redemption. Examples occur in the sacred writings as well as in our constant use. The deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is called a redemption, and God is said on this account to be their redeemer, to have redeemed them from the house of bondage, and out of the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

But how was this redemption effected? Was a ransom paid as the price of their deliverance, as an equivalent for their services, as a consideration,



for which their oppressors were to let them go? Let the sacred historians and prophets answer this question. (Exod. vi. 6) "I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments." (Deut. ix. 26) "Destroy not thy people, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand." (Neh. i. 10) "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and thy strong hand." The nation of Israel then was redeemed, not by a ransom paid to their former oppressors, as the price of their emancipation, but by the mighty power and strong hand of Jehovah, stretched forth in those signs and wonders in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, by which the Egyptian monarch was compelled to suffer their departure, by which they were protected and avenged, when pursued by their oppressors, and were conducted in safety to the promised land.

The term is applied also in a similar manner to the deliverance of that nation from the Babylonian captivity. (Micah iv. 10) "Thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies." It is applied in many instances also to the deliverance of individuals from danger, captivity, slavery, or any great calamity; and the propriety of the term is sufficiently maintained, where something important is done, though nothing is literally paid, to procure the deliverance.

These examples of the use of this term may lead us to some just notions of its meaning, as applied to

express the benefit we receive, when it is said we have redemption by the blood of Christ. It is not, that his death was a price literally paid, either to God, to satisfy the demands of vindictive justice, or to the enemy of God and man, as the purchase of our release from his power. He was our redeemer in the same sense, in which God was the redeemer of the children of Israel; and he redeemed us by his blood, as they were redeemed by the mighty power, and the strong arm of the God of Israel. As God was the redeemer of Israel by the miracles of Egypt, so Christ was our redeemer by those miracles which proved him to be a messenger and teacher from God; by those instructions and that example, which were to remove our ignorance, and deliver us from the slavery of sin, and bondage of corruption; by those high motives to repentance and holiness, which are found in the revelation of a future life and righteous retribution; and especially by the confirmation his doctrine and promises received, and the persuasive efficacy given to his example, by his sufferings, his voluntary death, and his resurrection. He was our redeemer by doing and suffering all, that was necessary to effect our deliverance from the power of sin, to bring us to repentance and holiness, and thus make us the fit objects of forgiveness and the favour of heaven.

This view of the subject will enable us to correct an error, into which we are liable to be led by language, which we frequently meet with; as when it is said in the Letters to Unitarians, that "when Christ is said to pay our debt, it is simply signified, that

by means of his sufferings, he delivers us from punishment." (p. 94) Christ delivers us from punishment not *directly* by his sufferings. It is not that his sufferings are in any sense a substitute for ours. It is not that satisfaction is made by his sufferings to divine justice, so that the sinner escapes, because "there is no further need of punishment." It is not that our sin was so *imputed to Christ*, that he "suffered, in some sense, as he would have suffered if our sin had been really imputed to him," and that we are directly in consequence of this vicarious suffering exempted from the punishment. But his sufferings are the means of delivering us from punishment, only as they are instrumental in delivering us from the dominion of sin. They are the grounds of our forgiveness, only as they are the means of bringing us to repentance, only as they operate to bring us to that state of holiness, and conformity to the will of God, which has the promise of forgiveness, and qualifies us for it.

There is another term also used by the sacred writers to express the efficacy of Christ's death, which admits of a satisfactory explanation somewhat similar to that which has been given of *redemption*, and is to be understood as having passed to a similar metaphorical sense. The whole of *that*, by which the benefits of redemption are procured for us, whether it be the active obedience, or the sufferings and death of Christ, or both together, is spoken of as *a sacrifice*. (Heb. ix. 26) "He appeared to put away sin by the *sacrifice* of himself."

The meaning of this is rendered perfectly intelligible, and is freed from the insuperable difficulties that attend any explanation, in which is contained "a mixture of the literal with the metaphorical sense," by attending to a change from a literal to a metaphorical sense of the term *sacrifice*, similar to that, which has been noticed in the terms *redeem* and *redemption*.

A *sacrifice*, in its primitive meaning, is an offering made to God, as an acknowledgment of dependence, as an expression of gratitude, or for the expiation of sin. It is thus applied to the various offerings appointed in the Jewish ritual. But as the effect to be produced is the principal thing, and it is of little comparative importance in what manner it is produced, and by what circumstance or act it is brought about; any other act, by which a similar effect is produced, though no proper sacrifice be offered, is familiarly called by the sacred writers *a sacrifice*. We find the term thus applied to prayer and thanksgiving. (Psalm cxli. 2) "Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psalm cxvi. 17) "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving." (Heb. xiii. 15) "By him let us offer the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips." It is applied to a holy life. (Rom. xii. 1) "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." It is finally applied to an act of kindness and relief. (Phil. iv. 18) "I have received the things which ye sent, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing

to God." It is by a use of the term similar to what we find in these examples, that sacrifice is applied to whatever was done by Jesus Christ for our benefit, especially to the labours and mortifications of his life, and the sufferings that attended his death; and that he is said to have "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

It may further help us to correct notions on this subject, to be reminded of what a change the word Atonement itself has undergone. This term is now more used than any other to express the popular doctrine of an expiation for sin procured by the death of Christ, a satisfaction made to divine justice, the Deity thus rendered propitious, his anger appeased, his mercy conciliated, and forgiveness obtained for those, for whom this atonement was made.

But it is evident, I think, that this was not the original meaning of the word. It occurs but once only in the New Testament, (Rom. v. 11) "By whom we have now received the atonement." And in that case it is translated from a word, *καταλλαγή*, which in every other instance is rendered *reconciliation*. The same is undoubtedly the meaning of the word also in this place. And we have reason to think, that it was understood to be its meaning by the translators, and that they meant to use the word *atonement* in that sense only. This is rendered probable by the formation of the word itself. It is a compound word, and in some early English writers the composition of the word is indicated, and thus its meaning pointed out in

the manner of writing it, *at-one-ment*, *at-one*. Atonement then expressed the condition of being at one, in a state of agreement, reconciliation; and to atone was to produce reconciliation, to bring parties to agreement, so that they shall be at-one.

Dr. Johnson has mentioned two instances of this use of the word in a writer of the next age preceding that, in which our translation of the Bible was made.

“He and Aufidus can no more atone,  
Than violentest contrariety.”—*Shakspeare’s Coriolanus*.

That is, can no more agree, be reconciled, be at one. Again,

“He seeks to make atonement  
Between the Duke of Gloster and your brothers.”

That is, to produce a reconciliation between them, to bring them to agreement.

Now, when we thus consider the change of meaning, which this word has undergone, from expressing simply the state of agreement, the fact of a reconciliation, to express that, by which the agreement is produced, the reconciliation is effected; we find in the use of the word itself no support of the doctrine it is usually understood to express. The term has evidently a different meaning as used by St. Paul, and probably as understood by his translator, from what it has in modern books of controversial theology.

According to the explanations which have now been given, of the language of the New Testament.

on this subject, it will be seen, that those Unitarians who reject the popular doctrine of the Atonement, yet attribute an important efficacy to the sufferings and death, as well as the instructions and example of Jesus Christ, in procuring pardon and salvation. But this efficacy consists, not in their appeasing the anger of God, and disposing him to be merciful, but in their moral influence on men, in bringing them to repentance, holiness, and an obedient life, and thus rendering them fit subjects of forgiveness and the divine favour. The sufferings and death of Christ are thus represented as being not in our stead, but for our benefit; and intended to render the forgiveness of sin consistent with “the honours of the divine law, the character of the lawgiver, and the interests of his moral kingdom,” (p. 102)—not by satisfying justice, but by subduing the spirit of rebellion, restoring the authority and power of the law, and making men obedient subjects.

And these explanations meet in a satisfactory manner the true meaning of the two texts, which Dr. Woods has introduced for the purpose of illustrating (p. 101) the “bearing which the death of Christ has on the moral government of God, and *how* it secures mercy to penitent sinners.” According to this view of the subject, “Christ was made a curse for us,” not in our stead and as our substitute, but for our benefit. And his being made a curse for us redeemed us from the curse of the law, from the punishment due to us as transgressors of the law, by its influence in bringing us back to repentance

and subjection to the law. And when this was done, the sinner reconciled to God, brought to repentance, subjection to the law, and a life of holiness, the purposes of God's moral government are answered, its authority is supported, his law is vindicated, "God is justified, is seen to be just, is perceived to have a regard to justice, in justifying him, who believes in Jesus." It is seen that in extending pardon to the penitent believer, he has not yielded up the authority of his law, nor subjected his government to contempt.

The question which Dr. Woods here asks himself, (p. 102) "what hindrance there is in the way of God's showing the same favour to transgressors as to the obedient," is incorrectly stated, so as to give a deceptive view. The question is not, whether God can consistently with his character of moral governor, and the honour and safety of his government, show favour to *transgressors*, but whether he can extend forgiveness to the *penitent*, to those who have ceased to be transgressors, and have returned to their allegiance. The answer to this question would be very different from what the other requires. None of the consequences, which it is readily admitted must follow on *that* supposition, would have any place on *this*. God's readiness to show favour to those who repent and return to virtue, does not show, "that the authority of the law is set aside, and that no distinction is made between virtue and vice." Nothing indeed can show in a stronger light than this, God's love of virtue, and desire to encourage it by encouraging



the first return to it. No other expedient, which the wisdom of God could devise, certainly not that which consists in an atonement by the substitution, either literal or figurative, of the sufferings of an innocent person in the place of the guilty, will show better than the necessity of repentance and holiness and their efficacy in order to forgiveness and the divine favour, "that God does and for ever will make a distinction between holiness and sin."

I have next to make some remarks on the defence of the orthodox faith against the objection, that it "lowers the value of Christ's sacrifice, and robs his death of interest;" because consisting, according to this scheme, of a divine and human nature united together, the human nature only could suffer and die. So that, instead of the infinite atonement made by the sufferings and death of an infinite being, it is in fact only the sufferings and death of a man. The defence is made on the common ground of the "human and divine nature in Christ constituting but one person, so that all his actions and sufferings belong to him *as* one person." As this is the only defence that is, and the only one that can be, set up, let us examine a little its value and force. It is admitted, that if the premises are true, the conclusion does follow; if Jesus Christ is both perfect God and perfect man in one individual person, the defence is complete.

But in the first place I remark, that the possibility of two distinct intelligent natures making but one person, has never been shown to the smallest degree of satisfaction; especially of two natures so

distinct and distant as the divine and human, a finite and an infinite mind. No Trinitarian can deny, that in Jesus Christ are two perfectly distinct minds, two perfectly distinct, intelligent natures, as distinct as any two intelligent beings can be. But two distinct minds, two distinct intelligent beings, with each its separate consciousness, knowledge, capacity, will, and action, cannot be other than two distinct persons. But all these the trinitarian doctrine attributes to Jesus Christ. Separate consciousness, for the divine nature by the supposition was not conscious of any of that suffering, by which the atonement was made;—separate knowledge, for it is alleged, that the divine person knew that, of which the human person was ignorant;—separate capacity, for the human nature of Christ could increase in wisdom and knowledge, while the divine nature, being omniscient, was incapable of increase;—separate will, for the human person most earnestly prayed for that to take place, which it could certainly be no wish of the omniscient mind should take place;—separate action, for while the human nature of Christ was limited to the labours only of a man, and confined to a narrow space, the divine nature was extending its influence to all beings and events, and producing its effects over worlds and systems throughout the universe. It is impossible for any reasoning to show more clearly, than this simple statement, the absolute incredibility of this. But this is not all. The identity of person is not only shown to be impossible, upon the trinitarian hypothesis. The only ground upon which

some of the strongest objections to the trinitarian doctrine, that part of it, which consists in the supreme Deity of Jesus Christ, can be evaded is, by the assumption of two distinct persons in Jesus Christ: by assuming that he spake, and acted, and suffered, and was spoken of in two different characters. And this assumption has been made, as far as I have seen, universally by trinitarian writers, not in words indeed, but in fact. “*Here*, it is asserted, no argument lies against his divinity, for he is speaking not as God, but as man. Of *this* indeed he was ignorant as man, but he knew it as God, and *this* he might truly say he was unable to do as man, though as God he could do all things.” This, I observe, is the answer on which Trinitarians have rested, and it is the only one they have offered to all those texts, and they are very numerous, in which inferiority to the Father, limited knowledge, and limited power are expressed or implied. And this goes on the supposition of two distinct persons, and is utterly absurd on any other supposition. It is indeed a palpable contradiction to say, that the same person knows and does not know the same thing at the same time; can do and cannot do the same thing at the same time. And this contradiction, and worse than trifling, is attributed to the Saviour in some of his most solemn declarations, by the supposition in question. With these brief hints I am willing to leave the reader to make up his judgment, “how far the views of the Orthodox in this case are capable of being defended in a satisfactory manner.”

I would gladly have passed unnoticed what I find on the last page of the Letter respecting the Atonement, as it is unpleasant to be obliged to express the censure, to which I think a charge of so serious a kind, as is there brought against those, who reject the doctrine of the Atonement, is entitled to. This subject, it seems, is one, which it is dangerous to discuss, and on which it is not safe even to inquire. For certainly, if the rejection of the doctrine is in itself “a plain indication of the disposition of the heart, and a proof of a temper of mind, which is in total contrariety to the humble spirit of Christian faith,” it is not a subject on which it is safe to trust ourselves in speculating. The only safety is in believing without inquiry, receiving implicitly without examining. For if we allow ourselves to inquire, the result *may* be, that we shall reject, and rejection will indicate “a disposition of heart, inconsistent with the humble spirit of Christian faith.”

But this, I am persuaded, cannot have been the intention of the author of the Letters. The expressions must have been used in haste, without well considering their import and bearing. It cannot have been his design, to deter those whom he addresses from examining the evidences of a doctrine, respecting which Christians have been so little agreed, and which has been so variously understood and explained, by those who receive it.

A doctrine which we cannot deny, without incurring the charge of wanting the humble spirit of Christian faith, and about which it is therefore

unsafe to allow ourselves to inquire, we have certainly a right to demand to find either distinctly and intelligibly expressed in the scriptures, or clearly stated and explained in the writings of those, who propose them as essential parts of the Christian doctrine. But where, I ask, are we to look for a clear and distinct statement of the orthodox doctrine of Atonement? The genuine doctrine of Calvinism is indeed stated by the early writers of that school in a manner sufficiently clear and intelligible. But every feature of that is denied as a misrepresentation of the orthodox faith. We are told that the language of the orthodox, like that of the scriptures, is metaphorical, not to be understood literally; and I in vain seek for such an explanation of the metaphors, as to enable me to understand what is the distinct doctrine, which is intended to be maintained. A fleeting and shadowy image is presented to the view, which eludes every attempt to fix its shape, and dimensions, and features. And can it be, that my inability to receive a doctrine, expressed in words, of which I am only told what they do *not mean*, and not what they do, is to be regarded as “an indication of a disposition of heart and temper of mind, which is in total contrariety to the humble spirit of Christian faith.”

There are some other sentiments in this paragraph also, which must not be passed without notice. It is asserted, “that God, having sent his Son to be a propitiation, has told us, that we must rely upon his atoning blood, as the *sole ground of forgiveness.*” I would ask where God has told us,

that “the atoning blood of Christ is the *sole* ground of forgiveness.”

I find the prophet Isaiah, without any reference to any kind of atonement, referring the forgiveness of sin solely to the mercy of God, by which he is ready to accept reformation and a return to virtue. (Is. lv. 7) “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” I find David, in the depth of his sorrow and distress in the consciousness of deep and aggravated guilt, by which he had incurred severe tokens of the divine displeasure; in pouring forth his humble supplications for pardon, placing his hope, in no sacrifice, or atonement, but solely in the mercy of God, and the evidence he should give of true repentance. (Psalm li. 1, 16, 17) “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.”....“Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” I find John the baptist announcing the approach of the kingdom of heaven, with the call to repentance, and intimating nothing else as requisite, preparatory to being the fit subjects of it, but that men should “repent” and “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” (Matt, iii. 2, 8) I find Jesus Christ himself declaring, (Matt. vi. 14) “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive

you." And I find it the object of one of his most beautiful and touching parables (Luke xv.) to teach his followers, not that God demands with unrelenting severity full satisfaction "in the atoning blood and perfect righteousness" of another, as the foundation of hope, and ground of forgiveness; but proclaiming the essential mercy and placability of our heavenly Father, and his readiness, not only to receive and restore his penitent children, but to meet with joy the first workings of ingenuous sorrow and a sense of guilt, and the first symptoms of a disposition and wish to return to duty. "When he was yet a great way off, the father had compassion on him, and ran to meet him." To this compassion and reconciliation he was solely moved, as far as we are informed, by the return of the penitent to a sense of his guilt and his duty; "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."... "This, my son, was dead, and is alive again, he was lost and is found." I find it was the prayers and alms of Cornelius that "came up into remembrance with God," and that "in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is declared to be accepted with him." (Acts x. 4, 35.)

These declarations, and numerous others of the same import, must surely have been out of the mind of the writer, when he asserted, in the words I have before quoted, "that God has told us, that we must rely on the atoning blood of his son, as the *sole* ground of forgiveness.

I must take leave also to correct some other expressions, standing in close connexion with this. It is implied in a manner not to be misunderstood, in the paragraph in question, that Unitarians, or those who reject the doctrine of the atonement, "hope for heaven on the footing of their own virtue or good works," (p. 105) that they "think themselves entitled to future happiness on their own account, and rest their hopes of heaven on their own goodness." But is there no alternative between "relying on the atoning blood of the son of God, as the *sole* ground of forgiveness," and relying on our own merit, as the *sole* ground of acceptance? Unitarians, as far as I know, and as far as I can learn from their writings, are equally distant from each of these extremes. Their dependence is wholly on the mercy of God, for they believe that all men, on account of their actual sin, stand in need of mercy, and are wholly incapable of meriting salvation, and claiming it as a matter of right; *that* mercy, they believe, is promised to all who repent: yet that the salvation of the best of men is of grace, and not of debt, what they cannot demand as a right, yet may claim on the ground of the divine promise. A promise, too, not in consideration of satisfaction having been made by the vicarious suffering of a substitute, but originating in free sovereign mercy, and contemplating the change of character implied in repentance, as alone a sufficient reason for this exercise of it.

But though Unitarians, in rejecting the orthodox doctrine of atonement, do not maintain the



opinion attributed to them of the worth and sufficiency of human merit; yet they will certainly not acquiesce in the opinion, so strongly expressed by the author of the Letters, of the entire worthlessness of all the works of righteousness and good dispositions of men. They think such expressions equally inconsistent with truth, and of pernicious tendency. For if human virtue be thought of no value, and of no estimation in the sight of God, the motive for its practice is weakened, if not destroyed. We shall feel little interest in seeking high attainments in that, which is of so little consideration, or is so offensive, that it must not be named in the presence of God. But let me ask, where we are to find the inhibition so confidently asserted. Where “has God taught us, (p. 105) that no works of righteousness which we have done, and no accomplishments or dispositions which we possess, must ever be named in his presence?” I find instances innumerable, in which the reverse of this is expressed in a very clear and unequivocal manner. It is expressed by Paul, when he said, (Rom. ii. 6, 10) “God will render to every man according to his deeds,” and has prepared “glory, and honour, and peace, for every man that worketh good.” And as he thus believed that the good deeds of good men were regarded with approbation and complacency by their Maker; so he was certainly not aware that it was either criminal or improper to *name them in his presence*, when he so exultingly appealed to the course of his past life, and expressed his so strong assurance of the future rewards of virtue; (2 Tim.

iv. 7) "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

Such a thought must have been far from the mind of our Saviour, when he directed his disciples to plead their good deeds in their supplications to God for his mercy; (Matt. vi. 12) "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," with the express assurance, that this plea will not be disregarded, "for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Such a thought seems wholly inconsistent with the declaration, "That the son of man will come in the glory of his Father, and will then reward every man according to his works;" (Matt. xvi. 27) for such a declaration implies, that the works of men are of some account in the mind of Him, who will be their judge, are to be brought into solemn account, and to furnish the grounds of the decisions of the great day.

I would request you also to compare with the assertion under consideration, "that God has taught us that no works of righteousness which we have done, and no accomplishments or dispositions, which we possess, must ever be named in his presence;" the parable of the talents in the xxv. chap. of Matthew, and the representation of the final judgment in a more direct form, which immediately follows it. To whom and upon what ground, in the former case, was the eulogy pronounced, and the reward assigned; "Well done

good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things?" And in the latter, to whom was addressed the welcome, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?" It was in each case the faithful, the humane, and the obedient; and in each case it was the good deeds they had done, "the good dispositions they had manifested, the fidelity with which they had used the talents entrusted to them, the kindness with which they had conducted in the relations in which they were placed, that recommended them to the approbation of the judge, and procured for them the rewards he had to distribute. No allusion is made to a "perfect righteousness, which God has provided for them" to supersede their own personal righteousness, or to render it valueless. Indeed nothing can be more clear, than that if it be of no value, of no account, and not to be named in the presence of God, it is not worth our pursuit, and those are the truly wise, who place their whole dependence on the worthiness of Him, who was righteous for them, and trouble not themselves about the attainment of personal righteousness, which being of no account, can be of no use.

I know that this consequence will be rejected with abhorrence by every serious believer in the doctrine; but I know, too, that it does not follow with the less certainty from it.

## LETTER VI.

THE subject to which I would next call your attention is that of *divine influence*; the discussion of which occupies the tenth letter of Dr. Woods. Upon this subject we must keep carefully in mind the distinction between the general doctrine, and that which is peculiar to Calvinism. It is with the latter only that we are concerned as a subject of controversy. To the indistinctness and obscurity, which arises from confounding them together, we owe much of the difficulty, in which this subject is usually involved.

As to the general doctrine of divine influence, I observe, there is no controversy. It is implied in the government of providence, in the acknowledgment of dependence on God, and in every prayer. We may suppose it to be direct and immediate, or only such as reaches us through the instrumentality of those means, by which common effects are usually produced, and thus not distinguishable from the common course of nature. None, I suppose, will deny the possibility of a direct access to the human mind by him, who gave being and all its powers to that mind; and the reality of it will always be a fact, depending like every other fact upon evidence; to be received or rejected as the evidence is perceived to be satisfactory or not.

It will not, I presume, be pretended, that the direct influence of the spirit of God upon the mind is of such a nature, that men can be conscious of it at the

time, so as to distinguish it with certainty from the natural operations of the mind under the influence of external circumstances, and the variety of motives, which are presented to it. There can then be no evidence of it in any particular instance. Our proof of the doctrine must be drawn, not from experience or observation, but solely from those texts of scripture, which are supposed to assert it; and those are to be subjected to just rules of interpretation, in order to ascertain, whether that, and that only, can have been the meaning of the spirit that dictated them.

But without any immediate and direct influence upon the mind, the most important effects may be produced, and changes brought about within us, by a variety of instruments and means, in a manner analogous to that, in which all the great purposes of God are accomplished in the natural and moral world. God is to be acknowledged, his hand is to be seen, the operations of his spirit appear in all the events that take place. Yet not a direct and immediate agency is to be perceived. Instruments and means are employed, but the hand that employs them is unseen. Not seldom a long and circuitous train of them, the connexions and combinations of which it is not in our power to trace, conceals from our view the spirit that guides, and the power that effects the whole.

Nor is it only great events, and the accomplishment of great purposes, that we are to trace to the agency of the spirit of God. It extends not less to the common provisions and constant occurrences of

life ; to the food by which our life is supported, and every provision by which it is made comfortable. These are the gift of God ; not directly, not independently of our exertions, nor without the exertions of others, but by employing them both. God is also the preserver of our lives, and is to be so acknowledged in all the common, as well as the uncommon exigences of our being. Not, however, by immediate acts of power, and a direct agency, is this done, but by the instrumentality of an infinite variety and complicated system of means. Of these means, our own exertions, and the assistance of others, constitute an essential, and a principal part. If they are neglected or withheld, the protecting care of heaven is withheld. We perish. A miracle is not wrought to save him, who takes no care to save himself.

It is in a similar manner, by instruments and means, not by a direct action upon the mind, that the spirit of God produces its great effects in bringing men to repentance, holiness, and virtue. Among these, the most important are the instructions of the holy scriptures. "The word of God (1 Pet. i. 23) is the incorruptible seed, by which men are born again." Whatever good influences are produced by it, are influences of the spirit of God. The same may be said of Christian institutions, religious assemblies, public worship. The usual course of providence, but especially deviations from it in remarkable events and uncommon phenomena, are means for accomplishing the same purposes. The same also is to be said of the priest-

hood, religious rites, and prophetic office under the former dispensation, and the Christian ministry, and the whole system of written and oral instruction under the present. And those who are thus employed in “converting sinners from the error of their ways, and turning many to righteousness,” are represented as “ambassadors of Christ.” They are his agents, act in his stead, and, whatever effects are produced, they are the proper fruits of the spirit, and may be considered as the work of that spirit, which projected the great scheme, and which provides for and directs its execution.

Now, were there nothing more direct and immediate, than those influences, which have now been mentioned, there would be enough to answer to most of the language of the Bible on the subject; enough to give a fair and important meaning to all the texts alluded to by Dr. Woods. (p. 107) Those are the instruments and means by which God is constantly “working in men both to will and to do; creating in them a new heart and a new spirit; opening their eyes, drawing, turning, renewing, strengthening them, helping their infirmities.”

All that is said to show, that a divine influence upon the mind *may* be consistent with human liberty and proper activity, is to no purpose; for neither the reality of a divine influence, nor its consistency with human liberty and activity is denied. That is not the question in dispute between Unitarians and Calvinists. The question is, whether the doctrine of divine influence, in the peculiar sense in

which it is held by Calvinists, is consistent with human liberty and activity. Nor is it whether they affirm it to be so, but whether it can be shown to be so in reality.

It is in vain that Dr. Woods has blended together and confounded the general doctrine of divine influence, which is held by Christians in common, with the peculiar doctrine of Calvinism respecting special irresistible grace. In vain has he softened down the offensive features of the system, and explained away, or endeavoured to give an unexceptionable meaning to the terms *irresistible*, *overpowering*, *invincible*, used by the Orthodox in relation to the subject. The import of these terms is to be found in the known and avowed doctrines of Calvinism, as they are stated by the most approved writers, and in the Confessions of Faith deliberately drawn up by Councils, and received by churches, which profess to make the Calvinistic faith their standard.

Now, according to these, “all those, whom God hath predestinated to life, *and those only*, he is pleased in his appointed time, effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.”—“This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone; not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the holy spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call.”—“Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ, so also are all other



elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.”—“Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved. Much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess.”  
*(Westminster Confession.)*

In the above extracts from an instrument of high authority, we have a clear and distinct statement of the orthodox doctrine respecting that influence of the spirit, by which regeneration is effected; and by which alone men can be brought out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, and brought into a state of salvation. It is an influence confined to the elect; granted exclusively to those, who are predestinated to eternal life; granted to them also in a perfectly arbitrary manner; not being on account of any thing foreseen in them, still less on account of any thing already in them; since, until it takes place, they are, according to this scheme, in a state of sin and death, wholly inclined to evil, and indisposed to all good. In those, upon whom this influence is exerted, its effects take place without any agency or cooperation of theirs, for they are wholly passive in it. It is the irresistible and unaided work of the spirit of God, which man can do nothing either to assist or to prevent. In all those, who are the subject of it, it is effectual, and

their regeneration and final salvation are sure. Those to whom this influence is denied, or from whom it is withheld, are not elected; and they can never be regenerated, and consequently their salvation is impossible.

It will be objected, perhaps, that the Orthodox, though they receive in general and substantially the doctrines contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism, yet they are not satisfied with them in all respects, and do not subscribe to all their language.

To this objection they have an undoubted right, and Dr. Woods, as their representative, has a right to be judged upon a fair construction of the language, which is used in the Creed of the Theological Institution with which he is connected; and that which he has himself used, as far as he has proceeded in giving a statement and explanation of the doctrine.

But little, I think, will be gained by this toward relieving the doctrine, which he means to maintain, from the charges which are brought against the orthodox system on this point.

In the following extracts from the Creed of the Theological Institution at Andover, I think you will find every important idea expressed or implied, that is to be found in the passages before given from the Westminster Confession. “By nature every man is personally depraved, destitute of holiness, unlike and opposed to God, and previously to the renewing agency of the divine spirit, all his moral actions are adverse to the character and glory of God; being morally incapable of recovering the image of his

Creator, which was lost in Adam, every man is justly exposed to eternal damnation ; so that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ; ...God, of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life....no means whatever can change the heart of a sinner, and make it holy ...regeneration and sanctification are effects of the creating and renewing agency of the holy spirit."

A cursory reading of Dr. Woods' Letter on this subject might lead to an impression of something short of the doctrine expressed in these extracts ; but the following sentence, taken in the connexion in which it is used, and in connexion with the other doctrines defended in his Letters, will be found, I think, to express or imply all that is contained in the fuller and more naked and undisguised statement of the Westminster Divines. He is speaking of the meaning of the words *irresistible, overpowering*, as used by orthodox writers, in reference to the divine influence upon the minds of men, when he says (p. 116,) "What the nature of the disorder is, God knows, and is perfectly able to apply a suitable and efficacious remedy. Now, when this almighty Physician kindly undertakes the cure of our souls, the obstinacy of the disorder yields ; its resistance is taken away : that is to say, the heart is effectually cleansed from its pollution ; love of sin, enmity to God, pride, ingratitude, and selfish, earthly desires are subdued, and man is induced to love God, and obey his commands." He had before explained the orthodox faith in general by saying (p. 108,) "We believe, that all virtue or holiness in man is to be

ascribed to the influence of the divine spirit, and that without the effectual agency of the spirit, man would have no holy affections, and perform no acts of holy obedience.”

Now what is the disorder, to which the efficacious remedy is to be applied; and for which, as we shall see, there is no other cure? If we look back to the fifth and sixth letters of Dr. Woods, we shall find it described. It is a state of entire moral corruption, in which every man is born into the world, and in which every man continues until he is renewed by the holy spirit. It is, that men are by nature, that is, as they came first from the hand of the Creator, destitute of holiness; not only so, but subjects of an innate moral depravity, from the first inclined to evil, and while unrenewed, their affections and actions wholly wrong. This is the disease, as to its nature and extent.

Passing to the next letters, seventh and eighth, we are told to whom, and on what ground, a cure is applied. Those, who are to be delivered from this moral bondage, this original state of depravity, to be regenerated, renewed, and saved, are selected from the mass of mankind by a sovereign act of the divine will, without any thing in them, as the reason why they were chosen, rather than the others, who are passed by, left to remain in sin, and to perish for ever.

Being thus elected, thus predestinated to eternal life, they become the subjects of the efficacious, renovating influence, under consideration. And when this “almighty Physician undertakes the cure,

the disorder yields." He cannot be defeated. He cannot be resisted. The fact then is, that all, whom God undertakes to renew, all to whom he applies that effectual influence, which is to subdue the obstinacy of the disorder, are in fact renewed. The love of sin and enmity to God are subdued, and they are brought to the love of God and obedience. And this effect is produced, because he who knows the disorder has known how to apply a remedy; and has applied one, which must produce a cure.

It follows, then, that this remedy has been applied to *no others*. Those who are not renewed have none of this influence employed upon them; for if they had, they also would have been renewed, since this influence is efficacious, cannot be resisted, cannot be defeated. Their failure then is for the want of that, which is granted to the others, and without which it was impossible for them to be renewed and saved. "All virtue, all holiness in man is to be ascribed to this efficacious influence; without it man would have no holy affections, and would perform no acts of holy obedience." (p. 108) Those, then, who have holiness and virtue, have it solely in consequence of their having this influence, which makes them, and cannot fail to make them holy; and those who have none, but remain unholy, sinful, enemies to God, are destitute of it solely because they have not that influence, which, if they had, could not fail to produce the same effect in them, which it has produced in others. This is but a fair and full, unexaggerated development of the

doctrine, according to Dr. Woods' own statement of it. And whether it be not in every point the same as that which is more clearly stated in the Westminster Confession, every one can judge.

From the doctrine, thus stated, Unitarians, I believe, generally dissent, and maintain a very different opinion on the subject. They dissent, because they think it inconsistent with all the representations we have in the scriptures of the moral character of God, and with the condition of man, as a free and accountable being ;—inconsistent with all those texts, which complain of the sins of men ; because, by the supposition, they act only according to the nature given them, and could not act otherwise without assistance and influence, which are not given to them ;—inconsistent with all the commands of the Gospel to believe, repent, be renewed, and to love God with the whole heart ; since they have no ability to do any part of this, till almighty power is exerted to make them willing ; and it is equally impossible for them not to do it, when this power is exerted ;—inconsistent with the sincerity of all exhortations, encouragements, and promises to the exertions of men, since it supposes them incapable of willing to perform either of these acts ; that it is not of themselves to will any thing good, but they depend for it on an influence, over which they have no control, and which they can do nothing to procure.

Taking this doctrine of an efficacious influence, without which there can be no holy affection, and no act of holy obedience, in connexion with the

whole scheme of doctrine, of which it makes an essential part; we are unable to reconcile it with the paternal character of God, or a righteous government, or to perceive how it can consist with a moral accountability. We are unable to see how the character of God can be vindicated, in creating beings with a nature totally depraved, inclined only to evil, demanding of them holiness, which they are utterly unable to exercise, without an irresistible influence in renewing their hearts, and giving them right dispositions and desires; which influence he grants to some, and denies to others, without any difference in them as the ground or reason of the distinction; and punishing those for not exercising this holiness, to whom he had never granted the assistance, without which it was never possible to them. And we are equally unable to see how those could be accountable for their actions, and the subjects of reasonable blame for their unholy and wicked lives, who were brought into being with hearts totally corrupt, inclined to evil, and evil only, and from whom that efficacious renovating influence has been withheld, without which it was never possible for them to be renewed, to "have any holy affections, or to perform any acts of holy obedience." The sinner seems upon this scheme to have a perfect apology to offer for his continuing in sin; a complete and satisfactory excuse for every defect and for every crime, however numerous, and however great.

It may be useful to give you a distinct statement of the several points, in which our views upon this

subject are at variance with those, which we find advocated by Dr. Woods. In the first place, a different account of the moral nature of man, and his character and disposition, as he comes from the hand of the Creator, leads to a different opinion correspondent to it, of what is necessary, in order to his becoming holy, and a fit subject of the approbation and favour of the Author of his being. Not seeing in him a nature wholly corrupt, inclined only to evil, and an enemy of God, we perceive no necessity for an almighty, irresistible influence to be employed for the purpose of producing an entire change of nature, opposite inclinations, dispositions, and course of action from those, to which he was directed by his natural constitution. Believing him to possess faculties and affections, equally capable of a right and a wrong direction, neither morally good nor bad by nature, but equally capable of becoming either, we see a moral discipline under which he is placed, adapted to such a nature, such capacities, and such dispositions. The influence and agency of the spirit of God is to be acknowledged in the whole of that discipline which is intended to improve, exalt, and perfect our nature, or to correct any wrong tendencies it may have acquired, and restore it to a right direction, and its previous purity.

In this light are to be viewed all the means and the motives of religion, the institutions of society, the course of providence, events calculated to lead to reflection, to produce seriousness, to give us just views of our nature, condition, duty, prospects,



and hopes ; what we are, and what we ought to be, or are designed to be. Whatever is adapted to subdue the power of sin, to control the bad passions, and to bring us to the love of holiness, and the practice of every virtue. In all this the agency of God is to be acknowledged, as the purposes of God are to be perceived. Not a direct and immediate agency, but such as we see exercised in every thing else through the universe ; God bringing about his ends by a variety of means, and employing in them the subordinate agency and instrumentality of his creatures.

It is by such means, that the spirit of God produces its great moral effects, operates on the minds and hearts of men, reconciles them to God, works in them to will and to do his good pleasure. These influences are distributed to men in very unequal measure, and with infinite variety, as to kind and degree. The impartiality of the common parent is manifested, not in employing the same means with all, and exerting upon all the same influence, but by rendering to all according to the manner in which they act under the influence that is employed upon them, whatever that may be, as to kind and degree ; not in giving to all the same number of talents, and of the same value, for use ; but rendering to all according to the use they make of their talents, whether few or many. And here they find room for the particular and perhaps direct and immediate influence of the spirit upon those, who have made a good use of common privileges, upon the principle, that “to him that *hath*, more shall be

given." More shall be given to him, who has made a good use of that which he has, whether much or little.

Accordingly, Unitarians generally do not reject the notion of a direct and immediate influence of the spirit of God on the human mind. They believe that there may be circumstances of great trial, strong temptation and peculiar difficulty, that call for extraordinary assistance, and that those who have manifested a disposition to make a good use of the ordinary means afforded, will have further aid suited to their exigences, and sufficient by a proper use to answer to their necessities. They suppose also that any extraordinary assistance will be granted only to those, who ask it; that it will be granted to previous good disposition, and a sense of need and dependance. That God will give the holy spirit to them who ask, to them who have already right feelings, are sensible of their weakness and wants, and ask the mercy of God to supply them.

## LETTER VII.

I now follow Dr. Woods in calling your attention to a few remarks on *the influence and moral tendency* of the Unitarian compared with the Trinitarian and Calvinistic scheme; premising however the caution, that we must not confound, in our examination, as is too apt to be done, the moral tendency with the effects actually produced; and that even when this error is not committed, too much weight is not to be given to any argument drawn from such a comparison on either side. The reason is, that mankind are less influenced in their conduct by their speculative opinions, and the character of their faith, than we are ready to imagine. Were we purely intellectual beings, governed wholly by reason, there would be no such uncertainty or fallacy in our deductions. We could calculate with certainty how men would act, by knowing what they believed; and on the other hand, what was the character of their faith, by their course of life. But men have also passions and affections, on the one hand; and these not only serve to corrupt and pervert the understanding, but where they fail to do this, they yet are able to overpower the will, so as to lead them to act in opposition to reason and faith;—and on the other hand they have conscience and a moral sense, which, however the understanding may have been blinded, or misled, or perverted, will sometimes preserve them in a right course of conduct, in defiance of an absurd or

a corrupting faith. Still there is a general influence of right views and a pure faith, which is not inconsiderable, nor uncertain.

But when we come to speak of the practical influence of different forms of christian faith, we are to take into our consideration, that there are certain great principles, and those the most fundamental, and influential upon the conduct of life, which the several sects of Christians hold in common. So that great as the difference is between the Unitarian and the Trinitarian faith; on account of the fundamental principles held in common, the difference of their practical tendency is less, probably, than ardent and zealous partizans on either side are ready to imagine. Still, however, it is believed that the difference in several respects cannot be very small.

I am ready to accede to the statement implied in what is said by Dr. Woods, pp. 135—141; that the practical influence of a scheme of faith will bear some proportion to the exhibition it gives, “of a being of infinite perfection as the object of worship; a moral government marked with holiness and righteousness throughout; and the manner in which mercy is exercised toward offenders under this government.”

These are the great points, upon which the Unitarian and Calvinistic doctrine are at variance, and with this difference in view, Dr. Woods endeavours to show the favourable influence of the latter above the former in several respects.

In the first place, with respect to *love to God*.

Now it will be sufficient to remark on this point, that the practical influence of a doctrine will depend, not on the words in which it is expressed, but on the images, which are presented to the mind. However we may speak in words of the perfect justice, benevolence, and mercy of God; our feelings and affections will wholly follow the images in which he is presented to us in the dispositions towards his creatures, and the actions respecting them, which are attributed to him. If those are such, as in any other being would be thought arbitrary, or unjust, or cruel; it will be in vain for us to speak of them in words, that express all the kindness and benignity of the paternal character. The question then will be, not what are the epithets which the two systems apply to God, for they both apply the same; but what are the actions they attribute to him, what the images, under which they present him, what the principles and measures of his government? In these respects enough has before been said to show how the comparison will stand.

*Love to Christ*, and the value at which we estimate the benefits we receive through him, will depend on our view of the nature and value of those benefits, and not at all on the rank he holds in the scale of being. Unitarian views indeed ascribing to him only what he claimed himself, derived excellences, and a subordinate agency, will not allow us to give him the supremacy of affection, any more than the glory, which was due to God only. It teaches us to love him, to be grateful to him, and

trust in him, as him who was appointed by the Father to execute his purposes of benevolence; and who voluntarily did and suffered all that was necessary to procure for us the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. These are benefits, with which nothing that is done by any other finite being can bear any comparison; they are such as entitle him to affection, and gratitude, and trust; such as we owe, and can owe to no other being, but to "his Father and our Father, his God and our God."

Unitarians are unable indeed to express these sentiments in the language applied by Dr. Woods, p. 145. Such expressions of confidence and trust they can apply to God only. They have but one object of supreme trust and dependence. Were they to make Jesus Christ that object, they would fear to incur the rebuke, which the prophet received from the angel before whom he fell down to worship, "See thou do it not, I am thy fellow-servant, worship God." I am ready therefore to answer to the questions, with which Dr. Woods closes the paragraph which relates to faith in Christ, (p. 155) "Does the Unitarian system teach any thing like this? Does such a faith spring from the principles which it inculcates?" to say no! Most of what is there said, Unitarians would apply to God, but not to Christ. We find nothing in the Bible to justify us in transferring our supreme confidence and trust from God to Christ. It is accordingly the power and wisdom and goodness of *God*, which inspire us with humble and joyful hope; and which put

our hearts at rest respecting the important concerns of the creation. It is to *his* care, that we cheerfully and entirely commit our interests, temporal and eternal. It is in *him* that we trust for all that is necessary to purify our hearts, to guide and protect us during our pilgrimage, to comfort us in affliction, and to give us peace and triumph in the prospect of death. In these great interests and concerns, we cannot consent, and we do not find ourselves taught, to leave our heavenly Father wholly out of the account.

The tendency of any scheme of doctrine to produce *the dread of sin, and a watchful care to obey the divine precepts*, will depend essentially on the view it presents of the rewards and punishments prepared for men in another life, the heaven it provides, and the hell it reveals. Now it is not a little remarkable, that Dr. Woods should claim an advantage, in point of moral influence to the orthodox faith, on the ground that "it contemplates a state of higher perfection and purer and more elevated enjoyment, than the Unitarian describes." (p. 146) And "that the contemplation of a future reward, *to be obtained by virtuous efforts*, must evidently tend to excite those efforts, very much in proportion to the greatness and excellency of that reward."

For, besides that the claim of higher perfection and greater purity is without any foundation to justify it; upon what ground can he speak of a future reward to be obtained "*by virtuous efforts?*" The reader has not forgotten, that the sinner has no encouragement to virtuous efforts: "That no

works of righteousness, and no accomplishments or disposition must ever be named in the presence of God....that the only righteousness, which is to be the foundation of hope to men, is a perfect righteousness which God has provided....that we must rely on the atoning blood of Christ as the sole ground of forgiveness.”

*Unitarians* may be allowed to speak of the motives to virtuous efforts arising from the future rewards to be obtained by them; but with what propriety can the *Calvinist* do this, who believes, that the future condition of men is determined from eternity by an irreversible decree; that by nature they are totally depraved and inclined only to evil; that they remain so till brought out of that state by regeneration, and that regeneration is effected only by the special irresistible influence of the spirit of God, granted only to the elect, and to them, not on account of any disposition or efforts of theirs, which have any tendency to produce or to procure it?

And as to the influence of the different views of future punishment;—it might at first be thought, that the advantage were on the side of those of Calvinism; but there are two considerations that convince me to the contrary. For, in the first place, the punishments, as well as the rewards provided by that scheme, are administered on the principles of a sovereign, unconditional election; the desert of punishment, and consequently the punishment itself, not being subject to any human efforts, but following necessarily the divine decree. Bad men may be expected to avail themselves of



the plea of a moral inability, which, to all practical purposes, is in fact the same as a natural inability, or physical coercion. They may be expected to go on quietly in the course of vice in the persuasion, that if they are not predestinated to holiness and eternal life, no efforts of theirs can avail them ; and if they are, God will, in his own time, draw them to him by his effectual, irresistible grace ; that nothing, which they can do, till thus regenerated, will have any tendency to bring about this effect, or prepare them for it ; on the contrary, that they are as likely, I believe they are sometimes told more likely, to be thus arrested by sovereign grace in the full career of wickedness, than when using endeavours to recover themselves out of the hands of Satan by their own strength. This reasoning, and I cannot see that it does not proceed fairly on the acknowledged principles of Calvinism, must check, instead of encouraging the efforts of wicked men to disentangle themselves from the snare of the devil.

In the second place, we are to look for the efficacy of punishment and its moral influence in preventing sin, or reclaiming men from it, not to the degree of its severity and duration only, but to its certainty, and the evidence brought home distinctly to the minds of men of its certainty. Now, if you endeavour to enhance the fear of punishment, by representations of its severity, or of its duration far disproportioned to what can be the apprehension of the demerit, to which it is to be applied ; if you carry it beyond the bounds of probability, that the threat will be executed ; if it be such, that to a

reflecting mind it is impossible it should be executed by a just, and good, and merciful being, the Parent of the creation ; you weaken its effects as a motive, you lose in probability, and the firmness of faith, more than you gain in the force of fear. You excite a vague and indistinct terror and dread ; but so mingled with incredulity, arising from a natural and unconquerable sense of the essential kindness and benignity of the Author of nature, as to impair, if not destroy its practical effects.

The surest and highest, the purest and most permanent influence will be that, which arises from such views of the future punishment awaiting the wicked, as are consistent with the character of a Sovereign of the world, who has nothing vindictive in his nature, who adjusts punishment to the degree of demerit, who inflicts it solely for the purpose of promoting holiness, and accomplishing the purposes of his moral government, and only to the degree which these purposes require, and so long as they require it.

From these considerations, I am persuaded that the moral influence of the views of future reward and punishment, maintained generally by Unitarians, is far more certain, and powerful, and salutary, and purifying, than that which is the result of the orthodox views on this subject. And I am persuaded of this by another consideration still. It is this :— the virtue that is produced by cheerful views, and by the contemplation of kindness, benevolence, and mercy in God, is of a more pure, generous, and elevated kind, than that which arises from cold,

austere, and gloomy views, and the contemplation of severe, unrelenting, vindictive justice, and the execution of eternal wrath.

Unitarians believe that the representations in scripture of the future punishment of the impenitent wicked are, for the purpose of impression, highly figurative; but they believe that the figures, like all others used by the sacred writers, are intended to mean something, something of vast moment; that in degree and duration it will be such, as is calculated to produce the highest practical influence. In either respect we can have clear and distinct conceptions only to a certain degree. All beyond that, therefore, can add nothing to the effect.

Dr. Woods proceeds to a comparison of the different influences of the systems in question, as respects *reverence for the word of God*. To show that Unitarians have little reverence for the scriptures, and treat the sacred writings with little respect, he asserts (p. 148,) that, “the grand maxim of the Polish Socinians was, that *reason is our ultimate rule and standard*, and that whatever in religion is not conformed to this, is to be rejected. This maxim, as they understood it, gave them perfect liberty to alter or set aside the obvious sense of the bible, whenever it did not agree with the deductions of reason. Unitarians, in general, have, with more or less decision, adopted the same maxim.” The impression intended here to be made on the reader must be, that “Unitarians, generally, think themselves at perfect liberty to

alter or set aside the obvious sense of the bible, whenever it does not agree with the deductions of reason." Dr. Woods has not seen fit to refer us to his authority for the assertion, as respects the Polish Socinians. This it was his duty to do, in laying against them a charge of so serious a nature, that the reader might be able to judge of its justice. What authority he may be able to produce, I know not. But I presume it must have been derived from a passage, which I shall subjoin, which is found in the Racovian Catechism, which contains a summary of the Socinian doctrines, as drawn up by the celebrated Polish Divines. But if this passage be the only authority to which he will appeal, the charge is made with less care, than were to have been expected of one, so frequent and loud, as he is, in his complaints of the misrepresentations and unfairness of adversaries. The passage is this—

“By what means may the more obscure passages of scripture be understood ?

“By carefully ascertaining in the first instance the scope, and other circumstances, of those passages, in the way which ought to be pursued in the interpretation of the language of all other written compositions. Secondly, by an attentive comparison of them with similar phrases and sentences of less ambiguous meaning. Thirdly, by submitting our interpretation of the more obscure passages to the test of doctrines, which are most clearly inculcated in the scriptures, as to certain first principles ; and admitting nothing that disagrees with these. And, lastly, by rejecting every interpretation, which is

repugnant to right reason, or involves a contradiction."

The reader is now requested to compare this with the assertion of Dr. Woods, and to judge of the fairness of the representation. The principles of interpretation, as here stated, are such, as no Divine of any school will at the present day call in question. They are such as Dr. Woods himself, I will venture to affirm, continually applies in practice. The difference between him and the Polish Divines is only as to the cases, to which the principle is to be applied, and not as to the principle itself. A thousand instances may be brought, in which Dr. Woods will apply the principle without hesitation. No one will reject with more decision than Dr. Woods the obvious meaning of all those passages, numerous and frequent as they are, in which bodily organs and human passions are ascribed to God. He will exercise his reason in the interpretation of all those passages, which will teach him to set aside, as inadmissible, the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words that are used.

Luke xiv. 26. Our Saviour says, "If any man hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Dr. Woods, I trust, will be slow to insist on the plain and obvious sense of this text, as the true meaning of it. He will doubtless make reason his guide, in its interpretation; and applying his knowledge of oriental idioms, will set aside, as utterly inadmissi-

ble, the literal and obvious meaning of the words ; not suspecting that he is thus exposing himself to the harsh censure from some less enlightened and liberal interpreter of scripture, of taking the liberty to alter or “set aside the obvious sense of the Bible.”

Matt. xxvi. 26, 28. Our Saviour says, “This is my body,—this is my blood ;” and John vi. 53. “Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” Dr. Woods, I suppose, will be as much shocked as any Polish Divine of the whole Socinian school, or any English or German Unitarian, at the idea of adopting the obvious sense of these expressions, as the real meaning of him who uttered them. Nor will he much regard the honest Catholic, who, pressing him with the literal meaning of the words, charges him with perverting the scriptures, and destroying their authority by thus subjecting them to reason in their interpretation. But why thus shocked, and why not adhere to the literal sense with the Catholic, unless the principle be admitted, that reason is to be employed in the interpretation of scripture? Unless calling to its aid all the resources of learning, experience, and common sense, it may authorize us to set aside the obvious sense by supplying us with proof, that, in any given case, the obvious sense cannot be the true sense? This is quite a different thing from such an arbitrary alteration of the word of God, or setting aside its true meaning, as is implied in what Dr. Woods has laid to the charge of the Polish Socinians and modern Unitarians.

But who, let me ask, is the man that manifests the truest reverence for the word of God? Is it he, who indolently and carelessly takes the meaning that first presents itself, however absurd, or contradictory, or even impossible that may be; or he, who, when the meaning that first presents itself is attended with difficulty or doubt, sets himself with patient and laborious study to ascertain, whether it be the meaning intended by the writer; a meaning, which, if it be the word of God, will certainly contain neither an impossibility, a contradiction, nor an absurdity? Is it he, who, without suffering his reason to judge in the case, accepts the meaning, which has been assigned to it in an age of ignorance and superstition, and which ecclesiastical authority has sanctioned, enforced, and perpetuated; or he, who, using his own reason, instead of trusting that of another, applies all the helps that time, and industry, and learning, have furnished, to the discovery of its true meaning?

We not only avow the principle, that reason is to be our guide in the interpretation of scripture, but we declare that we know not a higher act of disrespect and irreverence to the word of God, than he is guilty of, who, rejecting the free use of reason in its interpretation, exposes it to contempt by attributing to it communications, which could not have been made by the same God, who is the Author of our reason. We profess none of that loyalty of faith, which consists in implicit subjection to the creed of a master, which is expressed by degrading and undervaluing our reason, or refusing its use.

and thus becoming prepared to receive absurdities, contradictions, and impossibilities for divine instructions. We think it to be doing no honour to our sacred books to be ready to believe both sides of a direct contradiction, because we think that we find them there. We are satisfied, from the very circumstance that it is a contradiction, or an absurdity, that we must have misunderstood what we there read. We suspend our faith, and apply ourselves with all the aids that reason, learning, industry supply to ascertain the source of our error, and to discover the truth. We believe that Unitarians, by doing this, have done much toward relieving our religion from articles of faith, and the scriptures from opinions attributed to them, which they never taught, which have been a reproach to our religion, and the occasion of its being rejected by many; who would gladly have received all that it has taught, had it been presented to them unmixed with the absurdities and impossibilities, with which they have seen it associated in popular creeds.

In order to estimate the relative tendency of the two systems, as respects *benevolent action*, whether in relation to the common interests of life, or that highest kind of it, which is directed to *the spread of the Gospel, and the salvation of men*, we have only to compare together the views which have been given of the leading doctrines of the two systems; particularly as they relate to the character and dispositions of the Author of nature, his moral government, and the moral nature of man, and his condition, as a state of trial and probation for an



endless being.—To this comparison I confidently invite you, in the assurance that no further illustration is necessary ; and that you cannot fail to be convinced, that no opinions on these subjects can be better calculated, than those which we maintain, to purify and exalt our best affections, and to strengthen the motive to every kind of benevolent exertion.

I am persuaded too, that upon a fair comparison Unitarians will not be found in fact to be behind other Christians in their benevolent exertions. Neither in Europe nor America are they liable to any peculiar reproach for the want of activity and engagedness in promoting humane and benevolent designs. In accomplishing all the great purposes of christian charity, as relates both to this and another life, it is believed they have taken their full share of interest, and have contributed their full share of exertion with their persons and their property.

In proportion to their numbers, no denomination of Christians has furnished more distinguished examples of ardent and disinterested zeal, personal sacrifices, and active exertion in the cause of truth, for the advancement of pure religion, and to promote humane and benevolent objects. None have contributed more largely to some of the most valuable institutions, by which the present period is distinguished. They have taken an active and leading part in promoting the great ends of the Bible Society, and the Peace Society. In each of these they have united together with Christians of all

other denominations. Their exertions and their contributions to the purposes of christian charity have been less the subject of public notice, than equal and similar exertions of others, for reasons which are obvious. They have not been exclusive. They have not been made separately. They have usually been thrown into a common stock. They have had no desire to be distinguished from other Christians,—have been willing to act with them, and wherever the object proposed, and the means for attaining it were such, as they could approve, to unite with others in promoting it. They have done what every one, who regards the great interests of religion more than personal reputation, or the advancement of a party, ought to do. They have exercised their judgment in selecting the objects, to which they should lend their aid; not always choosing those, which would excite the admiration of the world, or contribute most to give consideration or power to a sect, or serve to distinguish them from others. They have accordingly been less engaged than some other denominations of Christians, in projecting and supporting foreign missions, which, though the most splendid and imposing, they have thought to be one of the least useful of the achievements of christian charity. For this apparent backwardness and lukewarmness, with which they are sometimes reproached, reasons may be assigned, which are not inconsistent with their taking as deep an interest in the cause of Christianity, and the salvation of their fellow-men, as others; and being ready to

contribute as much, and as cheerfully to extend the knowledge, the influences, and the blessings of our holy faith to all lands and to every people.

The imaginary cases, which Dr. Woods has allowed himself to state, (pp. 154, 155) are wholly gratuitous. He would have spared himself and the reader, had he reflected for a moment, that a Unitarian might invert the picture he has drawn, and it would be entitled to the same consideration as that, which he has presented; that is, to none at all. Were it even in his power, instead of a mere supposition, to produce an example, he must perceive, that it would prove nothing to the purpose, for which it was alleged; since that would not be inconsistent with an opposite example at the same time. Were it a fact, *instead of a mere imagination*, that an individual Unitarian by becoming orthodox had become more zealous and engaged, both in personal religion and in benevolent exertions; and that an individual Calvinist, on the other hand, had lost much of his piety and zeal in becoming a Unitarian; it would not prove that others might not experience an equally salutary change of character in passing from the orthodox to the unitarian faith, —or one equally unfavourable by passing from the unitarian to the orthodox. I may have as good reason for believing that the one event would take place, as Dr. Woods has for the probability of the other. And our opinions are each alike of no value.

I have observed that satisfactory reasons could be assigned, why Unitarians are not seen, as distin-

guished from others in those “remarkable movements,” which in Dr. Woods’ opinion “present the only prospect we have of the salvation of the world.” (p. 153.) Some have had the opinion, in common with intelligent and pious Christians of other denominations, that little hope was to be entertained, of any important benefit from missionary exertions in heathen countries. So little success has attended all endeavours in modern times to extend the bounds of Christendom by missions for the conversion of barbarous pagan nations, that some have been ready to think, that no hope was to be entertained from human exertion, until it should be accompanied, as it was in the apostolic age, with some visible supernatural aid; until those, who are sent forth to carry the Gospel to the heathen, should have the power given them to propose its doctrines with the same authority, and accompanied with the same miraculous evidence, as it was when presented by its primitive teachers. Nor has this opinion been confined to Unitarians.

Others again, who have had more confidence in the efficacy of human exertions, and who believe that Christianity will finally triumph universally through the instrumentality of ordinary means; have yet not been satisfied with the means they have seen employed. They have believed that direct endeavours for the conversion of the heathen to Christianity have been premature; and have been wasted by being ill-timed and misapplied. They have thought that no permanent or extensive good was to be expected, except where the arts and

some of the habits of civilized life, and some of the human literature of Christendom have been first carried, to prepare the way for its reception. They have thought that those, to whom the Gospel is sent, must be prepared to understand it and to feel its value by some previous education; and some have been disgusted, no doubt unjustly, by thinking that they saw, in the *remarkable movements* alluded to above, too much of ostentation and worldly motive; too much that seemed like a call upon an admiring world, “*Come and see my zeal for the Lord.*”

By some it has been thought, that to bring men from the grossness and absurdities of paganism to pure Christianity, the progress must be gradual. The transition is too great, and would give too violent a shock, to take place at once. They must pass to it through several intermediate steps. Light must be thrown in gradually, as they are able to bear it. Christianity is more likely to be received, if it be first introduced in forms mingled with considerable degrees of superstition; with pomp, and form, and ceremony, and even with corruptions of doctrine, which bring it nearer to the faith to which they have been accustomed. Polytheists, for example, it has been supposed, may be more easily reconciled to Christianity, and more ready to embrace it in that form, which leaves them a threefold God, or three Gods, (for they will be able to understand none of those nice distinctions, which exercise the wits of learned theologians and acute metaphysical divines on this subject,) than that, which reduces the object of human worship to a perfect unity.

With such views and such impressions, they have seen their duty, so far as respects exertions in the Christian cause, lying in a different course ; not in sending Unitarian missionaries into barbarous nations, but in studies, and labours at home to purify the Christian doctrine, and restore it to its primitive state. They have believed, if the Unitarian doctrine is to be sent any where abroad, it is to the Jews, and the followers of Mahomet, among whom all attempts to introduce Christianity have been defeated by the corruptions, with which it has been accompanied ; and where better success may be reasonably expected, when it shall appear stripped of those appendages, which constitute their objection to it.

Other reasons also are to be assigned for that appearance of apathy, want of interest and want of exertion, with which Unitarians are sometimes charged. As has been said before, they have never been forward to distinguish themselves as a sect from the rest of their fellow Christians. They have never united their exertions together for the purpose of establishing a separate interest. They have felt no separate interest. They have been willing to remain, as long as they were allowed to remain, mingled together with their fellow Christians, undistinguished from the general mass, throwing in their contributions both of money and of personal exertion with theirs. They have thus contributed to swell the amount of charities and exertions, for which they have had no share of the credit.

To this course of conduct they have been induced in part by the love of peace, a desire to escape odium, and to avoid disturbing the public tranquillity and order. But neither the purity of their motives, nor the peaceful and silent course they have pursued, was sufficient to shield them from reproach. This very quiet and silence were brought against them, as an evidence of lukewarmness, and heartlessness, and indifference to the cause of religion; and their alleged inactivity was attributed to an opinion, that Christianity was of little value, and that men might do well without it.

They have accordingly found, that the reasons for their former course no longer continued; and they have changed that course. They have been convinced, that the state of things called upon them to use those exertions in the maintenance, defence, explanation and propagation of their opinions, from which only a regard for peace had hitherto restrained them; since the same peaceful and silent course could no longer shield them from reproach, nor prevent the mischiefs that they wished to avert. And now what is the consequence of this change of measures? They are reproached with that very activity and zeal, with those very exertions, which but a short time since, it was their reproach not to make.

These exertions are accompanied with the happiest effects. They have awakened a spirit of inquiry, which will go on and increase. They appear not yet, and it may be long before it will

be proper that they should appear, in some of those particular things, in which they are reproached with being deficient. They have much to do at home, before it will be in their power advantageously to the Christian cause to extend their exertions abroad. They have to awaken a livelier interest in the cause of Christianity and the progress of rational and just views of its doctrines in their own body ; to excite a deeper tone of religious feeling in that part of the Christian community, to which they have access, whether from the press or the pulpit ; to engage the wealthy to cooperate with them, by bringing home to their feelings, the great good they have it in their power to do, and to their consciences the solemn responsibility connected with every talent, and every opportunity and power of doing good. They have to excite literary men to give more of their studies and labours, and more of their zeal to the promotion of so great and desirable a purpose. They have to induce enlightened and liberal men, who by their professions or public stations have an opportunity of exciting a salutary influence in the community, to a more open and manly avowal of their opinions, and to unite with them in all fair, and moderate, and temperate measures, with the Christian spirit, yet with ardour and lively interest, to promote and extend them.

It is not doubted that throughout our country, a very large proportion of those men, who for their talents, and learning, and virtues have the most influence in the community, and have it in their power to do the most toward giving a right direction



to the public feeling or public sentiment, are dissatisfied with the Calvinistic and Trinitarian form, in which they have had religion presented to them; and if they have been led by circumstances to free inquiry on the subject, are Unitarians. But various causes prevent them from making a public avowal of their opinions. Among these, not the least is, usually, an unwillingness to encounter opposition and obloquy, and the loss of confidence, and of the power of being useful. It is among the encouraging prospects of the present time, that the reasons for reserve are ceasing to operate with all the force they have done in times past, and that the reluctance to an undisguised avowal of Unitarian sentiments is in a great degree overcome.

It is asked, by what motives Unitarians are influenced in their endeavours to disseminate their peculiar opinions. The answer is easy, and I think such as to justify at least all the zeal and earnestness they have yet discovered in the defence or the publication of their views of Christianity. They are earnest and active then, because they have a firm faith in the truth and the importance of their opinions, and that it is their duty to bear their testimony to the truth, and to leave no proper means untried, to cause it to be attended to, and understood, and respected. And they are fully persuaded, that the course they are pursuing in this respect is in fact attended with very salutary effects. One, to which they attach no small importance, is the well known fact, that, wherever the unitarian doctrine prevails, and the rational views with which it

is accompanied, a very important portion of society, the most elevated, intelligent, and enlightened become serious and practical Christians, who, in catholic countries, or where Calvinism prevails, are oftener unbelievers and sceptics, and treat Christianity with neglect at least, if not with disrespect.

The reason of this is obvious. Men of cultivated minds and enlarged views are often so engaged in the business, and engrossed by the interests and cares of the world, as to depend for their views of Christianity wholly on what they hear from the pulpit, and what they find in the popular creeds and catechisms, which, they take for granted, exhibit fairly to them the Christian doctrine. Finding the system, as it is thus presented to them, such as their understanding and moral feelings will not admit of their receiving, they reject Christianity without further examination; not thinking themselves bound to inquire into the evidence of a system of faith, which carries in itself, in their view, intrinsic marks of incredibility. When to persons of this character and in such circumstances unitarian views of the christian doctrine are afterward presented, their attention is arrested by their reasonableness, and their consistency with what the light of nature teaches of the character and government of God. They are induced to examine the claims of a religion to their faith, which is presented to them in a form, so agreeable to the reason God has given them, and to the natural notions that arise from what they see of his character and dispositions in the government of the world; and the effect of examination is a firm

conviction, that the new views, in which Christianity has been presented to them, are the result of a fair and just interpretation of the scriptures in which it is contained; and that the religion itself is as well supported by evidence, as it is worthy of the faith, and approbation, and affection of a wise and enlightened mind.

The time has been, within the memory of men now living, when in that class of society now alluded to, the most elevated, enlightened, and influential in giving the tone to the public sentiment, and the direction to the manners and practice of society, infidelity and contempt for religion were far more prevalent in this vicinity, than they are at the present day; and at that time the religion which issued from the pulpit, and which was the only faith that reached them, was Trinitarian and Calvinistic. I hazard nothing in asserting, that in proportion as those views of religion, which are generally adopted by Unitarians, have become prevalent, infidelity and contempt of religion have become less and less frequent; and our most enlightened men, with scarcely any exception, are among its most efficient friends and serious and practical professors.

I have now said all that I meant to say upon the doctrine of Christianity, as held by Unitarians, its comparison with the Trinitarian and Calvinistic faith, and its tendency and moral influence. I have endeavoured to express myself with the most perfect freedom and plainness; yet with the decorum and respect due to the solemn and interesting subjects which have come before me, to the author of the

book which I have had so much occasion to notice, and to those fellow-christians, who may dissent from the opinions and views which I have expressed.

For the declaration made with emphasis by Dr. Woods at the close of his book, "that in his honest and serious apprehension, the Unitarian system *is indeed another Gospel*," I was not wholly prepared; though it is one which we have before been accustomed to hear in different forms from other sources, for which we have less reason to feel respect. We are consoled, however, with the thought, that an excommunication, though pronounced *ex cathedra*, carries not with it now the terror, which it once did. Christians will venture to judge between the rival systems, and will take the liberty to decide, each one for himself, whether the gospel, as it is held by Unitarians, or as it is held by Trinitarians and Calvinists, be *the Gospel of Christ*.

#### ERRATUM.

P. 47, l. 3, for "by Christ," read in Christ.







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